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Superman, Can You Hear Me?

A Thesis Presented

by

Kristina Stoyanova

to

The Graduate School

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Fine Arts

in

Studio Art

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The Graduate School

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Abstract of the Thesis

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2012

We live in a world defined by language. The communication and our understanding of the world around us happen through words and symbols. We define objects, space, and relationships through the language we use. As we cannot isolate the visual from the linguistic disposition, it is difficult to think of works of art without thinking of their verbal form, without giving them names, labels and definitions, and without putting them in categories and movements. Since Conceptual Art, art became an investigation in the nature of art, and is no longer an object of aesthetics, but a form of examination and research phenomena.

[...]

In my art I am interested in the correlation between art and language; and how the meaning of the different art vocabulary changes in the different contexts. I am interested in the changing

relationship between signifier and signified in the context of appropriation art, contemporary photography, installation art and video.

My work is indirectly influenced by post modern, poststructuralists' theorists, like Julia Kristeva, Roland Barthes, Joseph Kosuth, as well as by the philosophy of language theories by Wittgenstein, to name just a few of them.

Dedication Page

This thesis is dedicated to Superman.

I would like to thank him for saving the world, and for his tremendous contribution to the American culture.



Table of Contents:

Chapter I: General Statement (Introduction)	1
Chapter II: Direct influences on my thoughts behind my work	4
Chapter III: My own works	6
Chapter IV: Conclusion	29

List of Images

Front page “Superman”

Page 7 “Shelves”

Page 9 “Whatever Michael Says Is True”

Page 12 “Why Study Philosophy”

Page 13 “War Games”

Page 15 “White Ninja/ Black Ninja”

Page 17 “Tell Me Tell”

Page 20 “Superman, Can You Hear Me?”

Page 24 “Unspecific Shapes”

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Very special thanks to my dear friend J.S. for being my friend.

Chapter 1: General Statement (Introduction)

We live in a world defined by language. Communication and our understanding of the world around us happen through words and symbols. We define objects, space, and relationships through the language we use. As we cannot isolate the visual from the linguistic disposition, it is difficult to think of works of art without thinking of their verbal form, without giving them names, labels and definitions, and without putting them in categories and movements. Since Conceptual Art, art became an investigation into the nature of art, and is no longer an object of aesthetics, but a form of examination and research phenomena.

In one of his essays Joseph Kosuth writes about conceptual art:

"The art I call conceptual is such because it is based on an inquiry into the nature of art," "Thus, it is . . . a working out, a thinking out, of all the implications of all aspects of the concept 'art,' . . . Fundamental to this idea of art is the understanding of the linguistic nature of all art propositions, be they past or present, and regardless of the elements used in their construction." (1)

This statement implies the systematic character of art as a whole. We cannot separate art from the language, and the visual representation from the meaning; but we also cannot isolate art from the art-historical context.

Every established art movement has given us its definition and understanding of art, as well as its linguistic constructs.

Unlike pre-modernist art that transmits a metaphorical meaning, modern and postmodern art are free from the correlation between signifier and signified. In *True-Real* Julia Kristeva explains, “Whereas pre-modern art seeks to signify a signified (the idea/content, or truth) by a signifier, in modern art the signifier becomes the Truth, and leaves no room for the signified. A tendency towards this can be observed in Expressionism, in which the Oberfläche (form) of the Artwork assumes prime importance and takes heretofore unknown characteristics, such as bright colors, unusual sentence structure or word progressions. The message lies in the form of the artwork.” (2). In this line of thought, artists like Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt, Joseph Kosuth etc... create art works that are no longer metaphorical, nor referring to something else. The meaning of the work is in the material and the form. Therefore, seeing them should be equal to understanding them, as there is nothing to understand beyond the form. They are signifying themselves.

However, the accumulation of meanings of material, techniques, approaches in this time period are recognizable and significant for minimal art, and become symbols on their own. As contemporary art has appropriated so many objects, forms and ideas from the everyday life, design, architecture and media, one can no longer see art as just communicating itself. It is impossible to look at works of art, without comparing them and contextualizing them in the contemporary realm. In late postmodern, late conceptual art works, art gained back the ability to signify; however, the nature of the signified has changed to meta-art and meta- linguistic constructs.

An aluminum box or a box of any kind, presented as a work of art, is no longer just a work of art, but a symbol of a time period and an art movement. Art is constantly re-contextualizing, re-

inventing and appropriating itself. Moreover, art expands its vocabulary by constantly appropriating vocabulary from the art world, the everyday life, architecture, design, science and culture.

Chapter II: Direct influences on the thoughts behind my work

In my art I am interested in the correlation between art and language; and how the meaning of the different art vocabulary changes in the different contexts. I am interested in the changing relationship between signifier and signified in the context of appropriation art, contemporary photography, installation art and video. My work is indirectly influenced by post modern, poststructuralists' theorists, like Julia Kristeva, Roland Barthes, Joseph Kosuth, as well as by the philosophy of language theories by Wittgenstein, to name just a few of them.

My interest in language in its different forms developed slowly through the need of living and working in countries where I couldn't communicate on my mother language. Living in Germany, making art there, and having to explain it in German made me think of the correlation between art and language: How much my art was dependant on my ability to explain my work in a language that I barely spoke at that time, and how my art started changing when I started articulating it better. I found myself in a state of "progress" or "crisis" (J. Kristeva (2)). I was constantly changing my view on art, and with it my art making process. I was experimenting with different art forms, different mediums and techniques, and was trying to investigate the meaning of art as a form of communication and language.

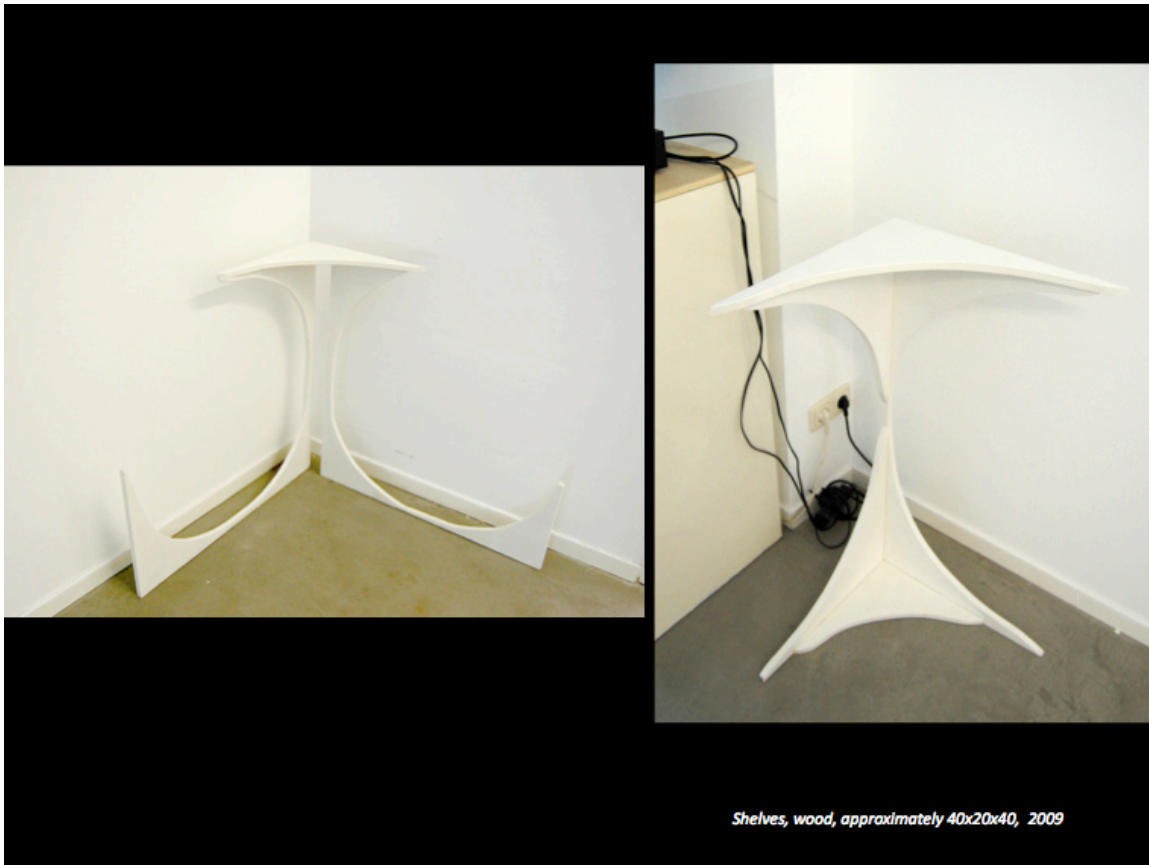
However, while admiring the abstinence from life that I saw in early modern, minimal and conceptual art, I couldn't stop referencing in my art the crises I was experiencing in the world outside of my art making.

I was both, fortunate and unfortunate to grow up in a time and place of extreme political change. I witnessed restrictions and fears under the Communist dictatorship in Bulgaria, the fall of Communism, and the early struggle and frustration with Capitalism. I experienced the opening of the borders, the invasion of McDonald's, Coca-Cola, advertising, etc, followed by failing banks, protests and seize of the government. I had no choice but to constantly follow the news. I was also compelled to keep track of and actively participate in the political life. Of course this has a huge influence on my art.

So, I saw myself somewhere beyond minimal art, using its aesthetics, but referring and expressing other meanings, reflecting my own fascination and frustration with the culture and environment I live in.

Chapter III: My own works

In some of my earlier works that I made in Dusseldorf, Germany, I was constructing objects inspired by design and furniture. They were reminiscent of everyday objects, but their functionality was taken away. These pieces were left only with the non-functional essentials of the object. The work *Shelves* was one of those constructions: mimicking furniture, but with a cut-away top surface, and standing useless in the corner like decoration. I made the *Shelves* out of wood, and painted them white. They looked like an updated minimal art object with applied signified. They referenced furniture, design, and minimal art, however, none of those labels were appropriate for them, as their function was taken away as furniture or design, and on the other hand, the minimal meaning wasn't minimal enough. They remain just symbolic structures, signifying missing functionality.



Shelves, wood, approximately 40x20x40, 2009

Appropriating recognizable objects is also a way to make the work more accessible to the viewers. There is something very intriguing in art works that intervene with everyday objects and re-contextualize them in order to create a different discourse for interpretation. In my body of works it is difficult to find continuity in the choice of material, however, there is a conceptual unification through the exploration of the material: often, appropriated material or references to everyday objects and substantial cultural icons is juxtaposed with contradicting material, or in an absurd environment, with little twists in the meaning and the outcome.



Link to the video online: <http://emedia.art.sunysb.edu/kristina/JWPLAYER/wms%20video.html>

The video *Whatever Michael Says* from 2007/2010 offers a new interpretation of the idea of truth. An appropriated footage of an iconic American movie from the 70-ies (*Miami Vice*), with the iconic African-American movie star Pam Grier is twisted and re-edited in a humorous but thought provoking way. In the original episode in the last scene Pam Grier, with the intention to revenge for the death of her sister, enters the apartment where the bad guys are, and kills the most of them. For the last one she gets help from a police officer who enters the apartment exactly when the last guy, wounded, was just about to shoot Pam Grier. My intervention was

very simple, I edited the video to make it look like Pam Grier enters the apartment alone, and kills all the men there; the men are shouting with high pitch voices before getting killed. Everything happens in very fast pace, almost in a cartoon aesthetics, taking altogether one minute. In the end scene Pam Grier falls exhausted on the floor, and a text, borrowed from an online explanation about truth, appears, saying: “Michel says “snow is white” and snow is white... or he says “roses are red” and roses are red, or he says...etc... But it can be expressed succinctly by saying: “Whatever Michael says is true”. The video is about the ambiguity of truth, and a comment on the media influence. It suggests the idea that truth depends on the situation and the circumstances, on the media, or the person claiming to express it. It also raises questions about gender stereotypes, and the role of the media in creating oblique conventions about reality, and truth. The genders in the video are separated: the female is the one that kills, and the guys are the victims, however, they are the supposedly bad guys; they are weak and helpless. After all, the conclusion that true is whatever Michael says, suggests the idea of distorted meaning and stereotypical judgment. The immediate response that I usually get from people is the question “Who’s Michael?” The truth the video talks about could be the truth of the media reality, the self-explaining truth, or the truth of Michael (whoever he is).

While addressing some social and political issues, the video is at the same time an investigation in the power of the narrative that derives from juxtaposing text and images from different sources. Even though the found footage is deliberately twisted and assembled, it appears as an assertive form of ambiguous statement.

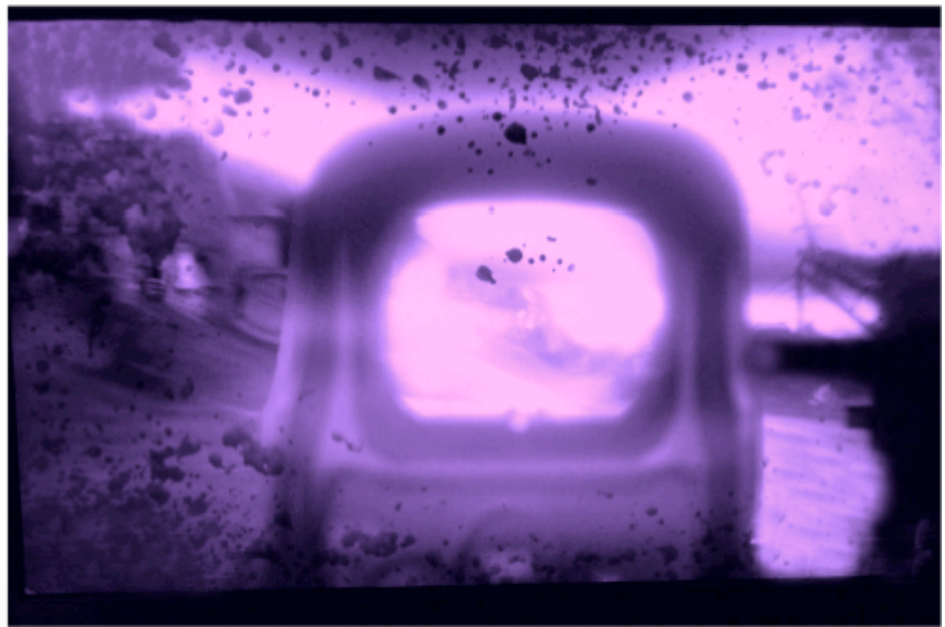
In one of my philosophical researches I was drawn by the Hume's causation theory (3). According to Hume, we cannot know if the events we are experiencing or seeing are really connected to each other, but we often make the connections in our own minds. Following this idea, I created the video *Why Study Philosophy?*- an assemblage of mostly found footage, images and texts that have nothing to do with each other. However, they were deliberately juxtaposed in a way that creates the feeling of a narrative. Combined with some politically loaded footage, the sometimes-controversial juxtaposition of images and text doesn't allow a completely literal interpretation of the work. It rather gives an abstract idea of narrative about anger and shame, where the viewer can assemble her/his own story. This makes the work appear at the same time convincing and puzzling, loaded with the essence of nostalgia and references to feminism, while refined with humor and unexpected controversies. All the footages are held together by a unifying soundtrack created from the original soundtrack of *Kill Bill* played in reverse. Using Quentin Tarantino's movie as a reference in my video was driven first by the fact that *Kill Bill* was movie based itself on a lot of appropriation and references, and second, because of its feminist perspective (according to Tarantino *Kill Bill* is a feminist statement: "A film about girl power."(4)). The reference to this iconic movie, as well as the cultural references are ways of appropriating popular public memories, and channeling them into an ambiguous statement that goes forth and back, to confirm and cancel itself.



Link to the video online: <http://emedia.art.sunysb.edu/kristina/JWPLAYER/wsp%20video.html>

I often rely on ambiguous statements to raise questions, rather than give answers. To me it is important to let the viewer arrive to his/her own conclusions.

One very obscure work on a controversial topic, a work that raises questions and gives no direct answers, is *War Games*, a series of six prints made from photographs of a computer game (*Modern Warfare 2*). I had a friend who was constantly playing computer games, and regularly buying new devices and games.



I found it interesting that an adult could become addicted to computer games. Additionally, I was shocked when I saw the content of the game. The graphics, the scenery, the killing and dying were so realistic that it almost resembled movie scenes or documentaries. To create the project, I asked my friend to stop the game in places so I could photograph the scenes. Later I edited the images, took away all the elements referring to a computer game, and left the scenes as realistic and ambiguous as possible. I printed the images in black and white on transparent foil, and presented them pinned on the wall with a velvet paper behind them. They looked like positives of a film, and at the same time the color of the paper, and the overlaying gave to the image deeper dimension. It was important to me to present the images like documentary photographs, and in a nice way, where at a first glance they would look authentic, but after a while the viewer would start doubting the truthfulness of the images. The main idea behind the work is questioning the concept of war as a game in a consumer society. The work plays with the shifting of borders between fiction and reality. A still image of a war game seems much more powerful and compelling than a moving image. The brutality appears more shocking; the action and the suspension of the game are missing; only the war environment and the cool aggression remain to speak for themselves. The images raise the following questions- how real is the war that we play, and how real is the war that we see on television? Why is a war game so popular? Why do we enjoy playing it? Why does it seem so natural? Where are the borders of fictional and real aggression? I was also interested in the way the idea of a game, and the idea of war are merged in one image, create context for discussion and raise questions with broader scope. United States was the perfect context for making the work, as it is a country “addicted to war” (John J. Mearsheimer(5)) that constantly leads military invasions in other nations under the pretense for

freedom and “war against terrorism”. It is the nation that promotes war the most, and gets the most cash out of it, it is also the nation that produces the most computer games on war, and even trains its military with computer war games.

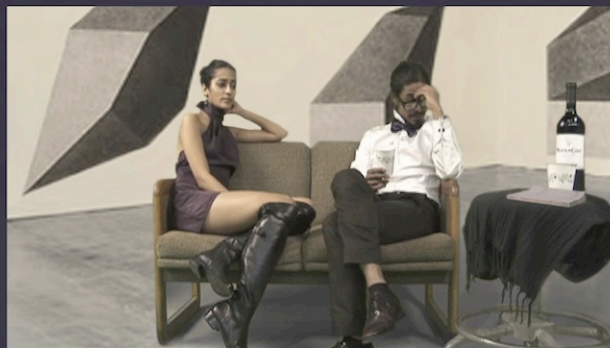


Another work that I made around the same time, and was also related to the idea of war, but in a more formal way, is *White Ninja/ Black Ninja*. It exists in different variations, but in all cases it is a group of two objects in the same shape and dimensions, made out of different materials

(bronze, plaster, resin, concrete, or wood), and placed on the top of each other. The shape is appropriated from an image of a ninja-throwing star, increased in size, and with no sharp edges. Making the object bigger, and leaving the edges thick and un-sharp takes away the original function of the object, and leaves only the beauty of the shape and the aesthetics of the material as main substance of the work. It is a very minimal approach, where the formal aspect and relation between the two different, often controversial materials is the essence of the work. With its shape the object turns into an icon or a symbol, often read differently by the different people, because of its ancient, but ambiguous form. Depending on the background of the viewer, the object would remind some people of a tattoo, a Chinese/ Japanese family symbol, etc. In the same way, the work *Floor Piece*, reminds on many different things- architecture, Lego blocks, symbol etc, and creates a space for different interpretations. The original image for this piece came from a bathroom floor mosaic by a famous mosaic designer. I made the two-dimensional mosaic image three dimensional, and out of concrete, bronze, plaster and resin, and placed the objects on the floor. In both works, the ninja throwing star, and the floor piece, I was interested in the idea of turning elements or fragments of the popular culture into symbols, or objects that look like having the potential of concentrating and condensing meaning in one form and shape. They look like they represent an idea, meaning or entity, but are at the same time distinct from it. They seem to communicate meaning, but actually become the opposite of a symbol, because they symbolize different meanings for different people. One of the works that I was inspired by, was the Claes Oldenburg's soft sculptures *Soft or hard, which is better?* from the late sixties. They are ironic representation of everyday objects and food as symbols of the American consumerism. Creating "fake" symbols as art objects actually allows the objects to communicate just

themselves, and manifest themselves as being art objects, because of the impossibility of being anything else. But the whole body of work, the whole series of soft sculptures becomes a criticism and a metaphor for a social issue because of its material, scale, and irony. In my sculpture the reference to a weapon lays in the shape, but this metaphor is defeated by the irony of the material, dimension and scale.

J: Give it
 S: Let me...
 S: Do you get what I am saying?
 J: No. Ah?
 S: Do I have to tie my bowtie with
 just one hand?...should I do it?
 J: Let me do it
 S: Let me.....Thank you!
 J: Are you wearing this?
 S: What's the problem?
 J: Where are you going?
 S: I have no idea of what you are say
 ing...What did you say?
 S: Why? Do you have a problem ... with
 me wearing this?
 J: I don't understand anything
 S: What is the problem with this? ...
 What's the problem?...It matches
 the color of your dress
 J: I never understand you
 S: Okay...I don't know what you are
 saying...What is it that you
 want?...Should I not wear it?
 J: You do whatever you want
 S: Should I not wear it?
 J: You never let me do what I want
 ...you always do as you please
 S: Try to make me understand what you
 mean... in a different way...
Should I wear it or not?
 S: Wait wait wait wait wait,...what
 were you saying a moment ago?
 J: You never let me do what I want...
 You only do what you want
 S: Ah...okay... what does it mean?
 J: It's not just with me...You do
 this with everyone
 S: Should I wear it it or not?...
 should I through it out?
 J: This is not important to me
 S: So, is it not important? ...What
 are you trying to tell me?...Is it
 not important?...so should I through
 it out?
 J: I'm not even talking about this
 S: Talk to me in a way that I under
 stand.
 J: I don't want to say anything to
 you
 S: But, I don't understand what you
 were saying. So I don't know what
 to do...I think it is going exactly
 as presumed: We don't understand
 one another at all
 J: Here do this; do it properly



Link to the video online:

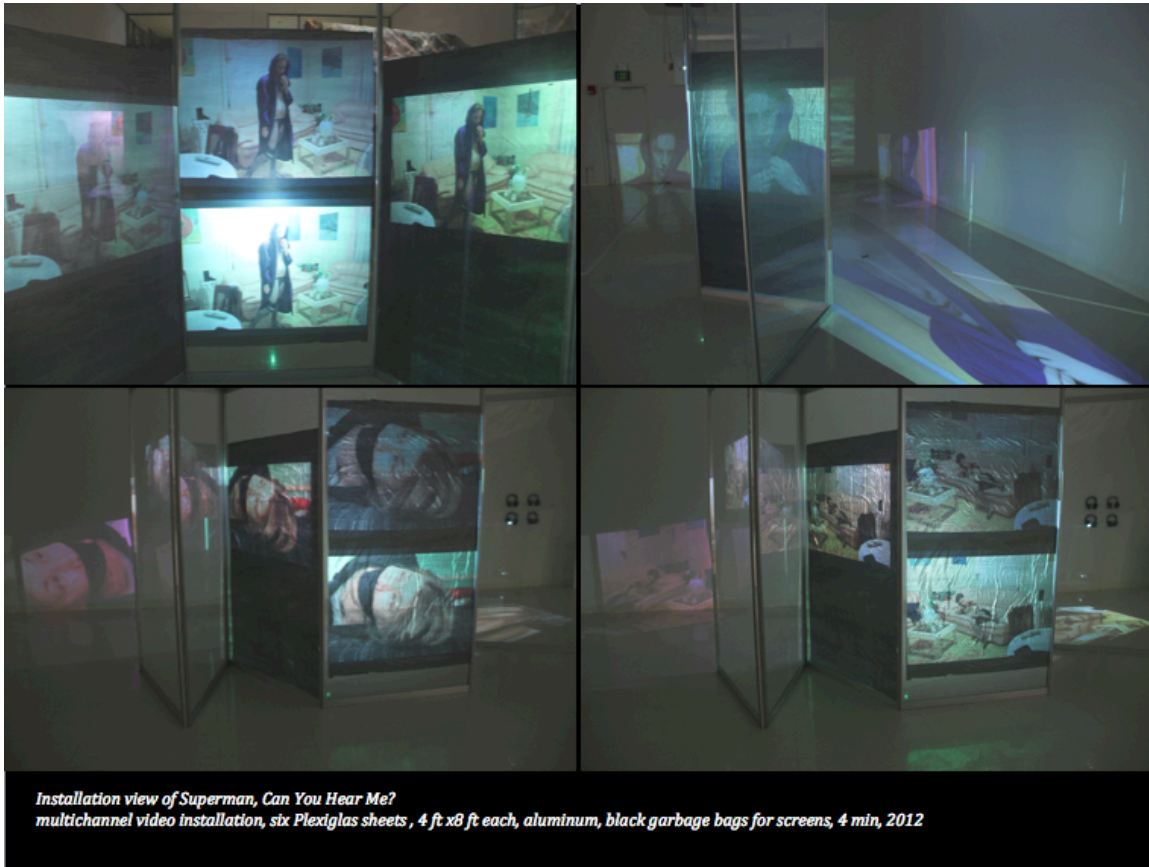
<http://emedia.art.sunysb.edu/kristina/JWPLAYER/tt%20video.html>

Keeping inconsistency in the medium, but similarity in the concept, the next work I am presenting is based on a fake dialog: the video *Tell Me, Tell*, a 4 min video from 2011. For this work I asked friends, which have different mother languages, to talk with each other using their mother-languages, Kannada and Bengali. The “actors” were communicating without understanding the language of their partner, but keeping the “conversation” going for a while, in a simple “soap opera” structure that I suggested to them initially. Eventually I asked the participants to translate the conversation, and inserted the translation as subtitles of the video. The background of the scene is a Sol Le Witt's wall drawing (*Drawing Series Composite, Part I-IV, #1- 24, B, 1969*), from Dia Beacon that I inserted later, replacing the green screen of the footage. The background gives a dimension of fiction, and a direct reference to minimal art. The expressive and emotional personality of the “actors” confront with the non-emotional background of Sol LeWitt's wall drawings. In a similar way the text, based on not understanding the language of the other shows confrontation, through which both, the image and the text get released from their original meaning, and create an abstracted level of communication. It is a video about communication and its different forms, about art as a form of communication, and the communication as a form of art. The context of a gallery setting turns the interaction between both actors into a living sculpture inside of the gallery. The conversation on the other hand turns the interaction into an abstract linguistic construct, into a double monologue, a double stream of consciousness narrative that creates a fictional communication, where the focus switches back and forth between the actual fake dialogue, the gesture and behavior of the performers, and the gallery setting. The rough-cut, blackouts and little deliberate mistakes in the editing make the authenticity of the setting and the dialogue questionable. The video investigates the boundaries

between private and public space, art and non-art space, fiction and reality, understanding and misunderstanding. The main strength of *Tell Me, Tell* is that the misunderstanding elevates the conversation to a level of a language sculpture as the language that loses its functionality as a direct communication, adopts a metaphorical meaning outside of its conventions. The dialog becomes a symbol on its own.

I have always been interested in the phenomena of misunderstanding as basic phenomena in our reality, and the communication that happens besides that. There is also an interesting correlation with the misunderstanding or misinterpreting of art- I assume that what I think when making an art piece usually doesn't come across in the way I was thinking it, and in the most of the cases it is the best outcome. I believe this type of misinterpreting is necessary for art as it usually leaves open questions, and adds more aspects to the piece.

While working on this piece, and reading texts about narrative, I came across Slavoj Žižek's texts about contemporary culture and politics: *WHEN STRAIGHT MEANS WEIRD AND PSYCHOSIS IS NORMAL*, and *Welcome to the Desert of the Real** (6). He caught my attention with a deep analysis of images of catastrophes and heroes in the American Hollywood movies, and their anticipation of reality.



Link to the video online:

<http://emedia.art.sunysb.edu/kristina/JWPLAYER/smway%20video.html>

My next art work, the installation that I made for my MFA group show, *Superman, Can You Hear Me?*, was an investigation in the super-hero fixation of the American culture.

It is a 4 min video installation with three videos projected on five Plexiglas sheets. It is a work that deals with media propaganda, and the way people reflect media in their personal life. The installation is a video and sound collage, where the sound is appropriated from the reality shows

(*Real Housewives*), radio news (for example the David Pakman's show where David Pakman interviews and confronts political and religious extremist, homophobic and racist guests), movies (*Superman*), and popular videos (from YouTube). The images are snapshots of some of my friends in their own, real or recreated environment. In some of the sequences the image supports the sound, in others it contradicts it, which creates ambiguity, and space for the viewer's interpretation and own associations. The video is edited to function like propaganda video: in a fast pace, with images that take your attention, and sound that helps you label things and people. It has also the propaganda-native allusion for a "plain folk", a transfer of meaning, and an attempt for dispersing a subliminal message. The voices and sound are manipulated in order to present the protagonists in a more favorable, or least favorable light; the images are repeated, and retouched on some places to attract more attention; the sound is being built gradually, repeated, or altered- all this are techniques used by media propaganda itself. The video suggests the idea that the media, TV shows, YouTube, the radio and the movies are a crucial element in the creation of the contemporary symbols and components of language and communication, and with that the culture as a whole.

It is a video about the queering of our culture through the media. Unlike art, the media has very direct influence on culture, and is one of the most powerful tools for creating changes in a short period. The symbols and the signs that the media creates are directly absorbed by the younger generation, and become a way for people to extrovert themselves back into the virtual reality that the media creates. Young people apply behavior and look from popular celebrities, and broadcast

themselves back on you tube, to collect likes, and followers. The video pokes some very cliché-type of behaviors that signify the contemporary western culture, like obeying the media propaganda and the super- hero cult, internalizing it, and broadcasting oneself, while copying and imitating the icons from the popular culture. Each of the images is a single photograph, which gives a more precious quality to the imagery, and a more advertizing- similar character, or a reference to art photography.

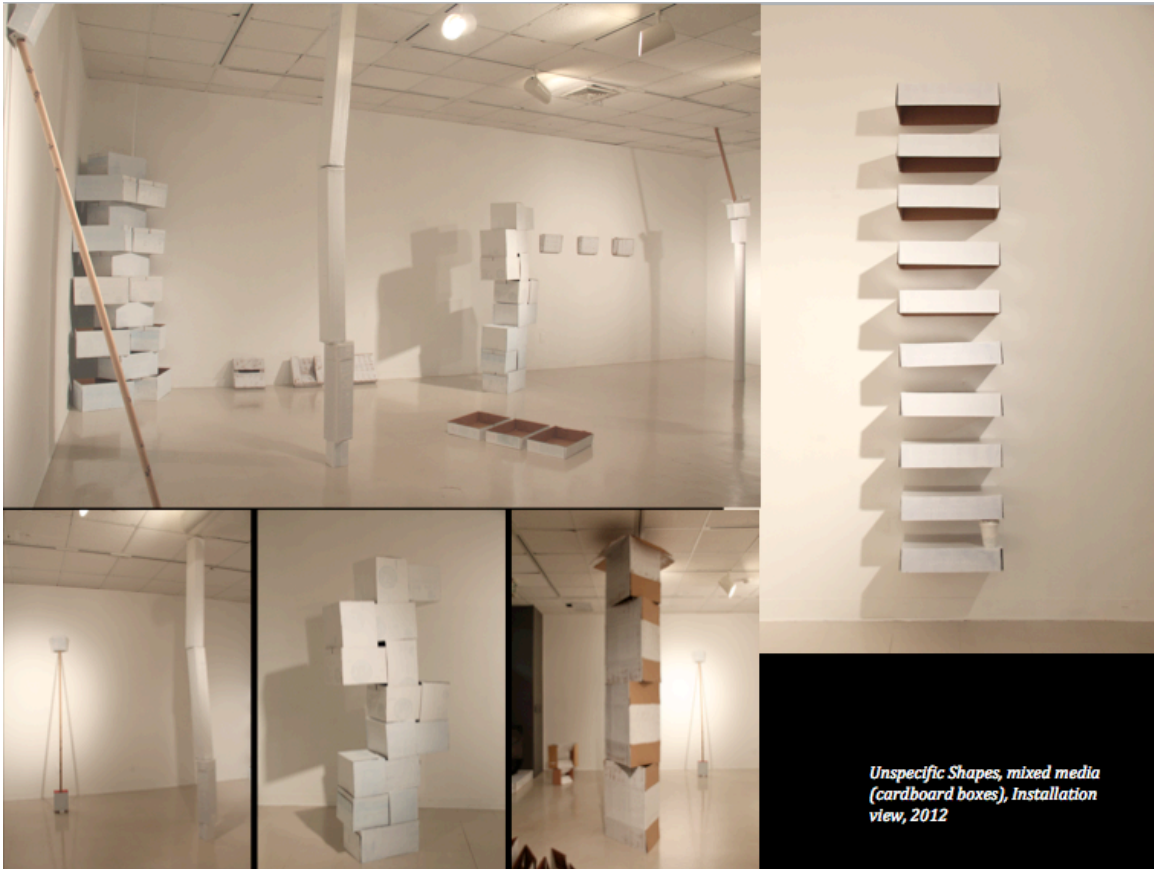
The way the installation was built allowed the viewer to walk around, and see the different videos from a different perspective, experiencing them under different light and angle; however, always hearing the same sound, and seeing the same images, multiply repeated, surrounding and reflecting in the space. The garbage bags are another illusion. At first glance, they give viewers a tactile and interesting reflection of the image, and on the second glance, the allusion to low quality, every-man's cheap material.

The allusion to Superman is a way of creating a symbol and at the same time a critique on the Superman-oriented western culture, where the signifier is more important than the signified. A character like Superman, who is fighting the evil, turns actually into a cult on itself. The idea of fighting evil gets on the second level, or even gets lost behind the figure of the subject: the blue male body with an orange S-label on it is not anymore a symbol of the fight for humanities, it is a cult of a super hero with super natural abilities, whose mission somehow becomes less important. The element of appropriation adds to the understanding the work as a critique on

contemporary culture, and at the same time makes the work accessible and understandable. In a way a little disturbing and a little appealing, the installation confuses, frustrates, and makes the viewers smile.

I have always been debated how much social and political critique should be engaged in my art works, and how the critical content interacts with the formal aspect of the work. When reflecting social issues, I was always trying to bring them to a level of abstraction that will overcome the concrete event that had inspired the work, but will keep at the same time the essence of engagement and statement against or for certain values. I prefer to let the viewer decide about the content of the statement herself, and yet, out of the stereotypes, I am trying to create original idioms that will offer a new rendering of the idea of art; work that offers assimilation of the everyday life and culture into the arts.

While thinking about the meaning of art and the originality of the different art movements, I was fascinated by the enduring effect of minimalism on contemporary art, design, architecture and everyday life. The installation *Unspecific Shapes* came as my reflection on minimal art, its idea of presenting the “essence of the object, where the work is set out to expose the essence, essentials or identity of a subject through eliminating all non-essential forms, features or concepts” (Kosuth) (7)



It is a response to the Donald Judd's essay *Specific Objects*, that helped define Minimalism. In this essay Judd discusses the newly established "new work"- the minimalist conceptual art, and the difference from the Modern European painting and sculpture. The text offers a thorough definition of space and material in the contemporary art, and becomes a manifesto for the "new" art. I called my installation *Unspecific Shapes* as it is dealing with the visual code of minimal art, however, using the opposite type of material and creating a meaning contradicting minimal art. I am appropriating the minimal look but applying to it metaphorical meaning, and turning the objects into symbols- something that is against the idea of minimalism. It is my way of objecting

to minimalism, where I am translating its visual code into different contexts, and giving it a different meaning. However, my work is not “retroactive”. In his *Specific Objects* Judd explains: “New work always involves objections to the old, but these objections are really relevant only to the new. They are part of it. If the earlier work is first-rate it is complete. New inconsistencies and limitations aren't retroactive; they concern only work that is being developed...” (Donald Judd *Specific Objects*) (8). In the same way, my work is not a comment on minimalism. It is relevant only to the contemporary art and my own art practice. It is a statement about the contemporary art as inter- textual: occurring in the dialogue with the culture and with the art that has already been created. The *Unspecific Shapes* are reference to minimal art, appropriation of it, and an objection to it, meaning to re-define the contemporary understanding of art. The installation consists of different objects made out of cardboard boxes painted white or taped with white duck tape. In a way it is also a site-specific work as I borrowed the most of the boxes from the library, where the gallery is located. I decided to collect boxes because it is a cheap material, available for me, and easy to work with. It also contradicts to the high-end material that minimal art uses. It is however as anonymous as the industrial material of the minimalism is. The work has two levels of appropriation: on the one hand, the ready made empty boxes have a meaning for me in terms of memory, label, and personal possessions. They have no real value, besides my connection to them, but they imply a missing value of the item that was initially there. They have labels and addresses that can be read if looked closer. You can see the light blue circle of the label, or the texture of the yellow/ocher cardboard boxes underneath the white paint. On the other hand the construction and shape that they create is an appropriation, because they resemble already existing significant art works from the past, like Donald Judd’s boxes, or Robert Smith’s

sculptures, Robert Ryman's paintings, etc. Although only one object resembles directly an already existing work – Donald Judd, the installation provokes the viewer to try to interpret the rest of the works as symbols for somebody else's art. In some of the cases the connection is very unclear, in others there is association to more than one work, and some of the pieces I made with no intention to resemble anybody's work. However, the art-educated mind reads the different pieces as symbols, and makes connections between them. The simple cardboard lids become Donald Judd, just painted white, and put on the wall in a row. On a second glance, once the viewer notices the taped with white duck tape coffee cup on the bottom lid, the "Donald Judd" association starts fighting with the association with a shelf, and raises the question "Who wins?" Of course, Donald Judd would always win, unless you don't know anything about him. However, the coffee cup legitimizes the use of a "recycled" Donald Judd for shelves. All the objects look different from each other, and have different color, size, original value etc. Covering the boxes with white paint, or white duct tape is a way for me to appropriate them, and abstract them from their original look, as well as to unify their look in order to build a consistent installation. Covering them with low cost material is also an attempt to distance myself from concept and minimal art. Although the final result looks very minimal and conceptual, if you look closer at the objects, you will notice that the material is the opposite of what is considered material for minimal and conceptual art. In this way I think my work could be positioned in the traditions of post-minimalism, post-conceptual art, and a little beyond the postmodern idea of appropriation, and "the death of the author", as my appropriation derives from very personal motifs and interests in the art history.

I am interested in the ways of applying meaning to objects that have lost their inherent function. Those kinds of objects adopt the meaning that I give to them from my personal memories, as well as the meaning that viewers with different memories would give to them. The meaning is delivered through applying a surface that looks like something that we know and recognize as art, but is not. The duck tape or the transparent plastic bags look like art materials, and are recognized as garbage/ packaging material only after a close examination of the works. The question whether the material the work is built of, or the shape that it builds is more important has no objective foundation. The work consolidates both in one, and eliminates the question about those single aspects. However, the viewer is allowed, or invited to distinguish the material from the shape, and the form from the whole installation, analyze it, judge it, and give it names. Name-calling, or labeling seems to me a very important part of understanding art. Would you like an art piece that you can't call a name? Is recognizing something that we have seen or know, when looking at art, the key of understanding an artwork? That is probably not enough, but it seems required to me, even when talking about abstract art.

I didn't mean to make my work exclusively understandable to people who have knowledge of art history, as it functions also just visually: as shapes and objects, as relationship between the objects, color, texture, material etc. The light blue under the white tape complements the light ochre from the cardboard boxes. The circled label on some of the boxes contrasts the very edgy rectangle shapes of the boxes and objects.

On the other hand, there is a playful element, and a sense of humor in the way the objects are put together: the anti- logic, and the tension, the instability, and the possibility of the work to collapse in any moment when somebody touches it, add to the feeling of temporality and instability of an installation that mimics something so stable and rooted in the contemporary art- the minimalism. It gives also a sense of lightness and easiness.

In many of my works humor is a very important element. It is the tool that helps people connect easier to the artwork, and enjoy it in an immediate and intuitive way. The humor comes sometimes from the unexpected use of material (for sculpture), or sudden contradiction in the content (for a video), or from the lack of general logic (positioning the objects of the installation in a non- logical way: like the unstable columns, where the small boxes are under the big one, or where the construction looks like it is going to fall soon); sometimes it is a joke on established believes, or a provocation to the viewers' expectations and understanding about art. I am rather searching for a direct inoffensive joke that makes people smile before reflecting on the artwork. It makes the art more enjoyable, sometimes it helps understanding the content, and sometimes it helps turning boring ideas into interesting art works.

Chapter IV: Conclusion

Working with language, structure and art conventions is the constant component of my art practice in the last many years. My approach has changed from a vague and unconscious to a more definite and mindful means of investigation. Although I generally don't believe in the immediate effect of art on the life, very often the social critique and references to everyday life validate my existence as an artist. This coincides with my understanding of the artist as a collector of impressions and ideas, and a messenger of cultural codes, standards and values in a future tense. Creating changes with art is less interesting for me as it is an occurrence that arrives over a long period of time and in a very complicated way that I can't imagine influencing- therefore I refuse to bother about. I am drawn more to the effect of art on itself, and on the complex network of art, design, architecture, culture, etc. Everything else is a side product that we, artists, have less influence over, and very often have to put up with. Juxtapositions, contradictions, or politically loaded elements in the art potentially help extend the dialogue beyond the conventional understanding of art. The "intertextuality" in art, or shaping its meaning through the meaning of already existing art is a fruitful congregation for the question what is art, and what is the function of art. Does the meaning of art reside only in the art, or is it produced by the viewer in relation to the art, and in relation to the whole complex network of the existing culture?

Do we need art to explain other art, and is it possible to understand an artwork without contextualizing it and knowing the culture it reflects, is produced in, or inspired by?

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