

A Reflection on One's Own Work – Ana Pintarić, Luisa Pascu, Katarina Kocijan

Introduction: I led the courses “Applied aesthetics and practices of art (around the artwork)” and “Applied aesthetics and practices of art (Beyond the context of art)” during the school year 2021–2022. The context of the Academy of Fine Arts in Zagreb was for me a new space for interdisciplinary pedagogical research. Ana Pintarić, Luisa Pascu, and Katarina Kocijan caught my attention with their research and brave connections between art theory, artistic practice, and philosophy. That's why we present their visual and textual research in the portfolio.

Miško Šuvaković

Ana Pintarić

Assignment: A reflection on one's own work within a framework of Jacques Derrida's theoretical thought

I am, in a way, more familiar with the philosophical concepts of Deleuze and Foucault and I often try to reflect their ideas in my own art practice. However – or rather, because of this, I have decided to focus on Derrida for this assignment, since his texts are not as graspable to me. To be precise, I had subconsciously accepted the general impression of his theories as being distinctly complex and the least comprehensible out of all post-structuralist authors. Before solving this assignment, I consulted with Antoon Van den Braembussch's book, *Thinking art: An introduction to Philosophy of Art*. Specifically, the chapter deals with Derrida's thoughts and their relevance in theorizing art. I have decided to single out the paragraphs that seemed most applicable in analyzing my approach to art. Informed by them, I turned to make notes on my artistic process, marking with a footnote which of the paragraphs initiated which note.

My artistic expression is primarily grounded in the specter of traditional figurative art. When arranging a work's composition, I tend to appropriate already existing motifs, for example, photography or other types of visual content that are more or less notable as symbols/signifiers of particular historical events or periods, spheres of popular culture, visual legacies of specific ideological movements and the like. What I

am attempting to create are collaged compositions of a large amount of these, contextually-specific motifs, all the while trying to avoid having the image offer clarity and coherence, or the potential of narrativity in the traditional sense.

I find that I developed this strategy as a reaction to views I had previously held regarding what my art needs to communicate. In short, for a brief period I was occupied with an intense desire to gain the ability to create images (in the vast majority of my work these are drawings, however, I prefer the broadness the term image offers) that contain extensive and complex, but synthetical narrative perspectives on particular historical processes I held to be (and still do, to a large extent) exceptionally relevant in order to understand the state of things in the present day. Even though it, phrased in this way, sounds quite idealistic, this aspiration of mine has persisted parallelly with my understanding of history as a problematic term that doesn't have much in common with the fundamental truths of the world's past.⁷ As a matter of fact, my understanding of the concept of history had been torn between my attempt at comprehending Marx's historical materialism and an even less complete understanding of the subversive account of history developed by Foucault.

As I haven't managed to overcome the theoretical principles of these two lines of thought, nor am I still, in all honesty, aware of whether they are contradictory in nature, and if so to what measure, I had decided in the meantime for an opposite kind of approach. An approach based on a lack of coherency (in the conventional sense) when illustrating history. Though I wouldn't wish to completely disparage this strategy, I sense that my use of it was in part the result of a kind of idleness (this claim, however, is deserving of a bit more contemplation on my end).

Nevertheless, this new fixation of mine was stimulative enough to sustain my capacity for producing images. I became captivated by the notion of prioritizing the perception of precisely the relation between two or more given motifs, especially if the motifs in question seem to be contextually unrelated.⁸ In other words, the dialogue between two or more motifs/elements which, in my approximation, rarely or never come in touch with each other within the totality of the visual field; the generative capacity of the (Western) culture/civilization for production of images. Accordingly, I am also aware of the fact that this is a culture to which I belong— which conditions my perception, as well as my capacity for generating imagery.⁹ Therefore, using the visual logic by which my visual perception is determined, I aim to extract combinations that seem nonsensical and illogical to me as well as to the viewer.¹⁰

What I find especially interesting regarding this approach is precisely how we, as rational beings, are naturally inclined to look for a logical link between motifs. As I'm selecting which motifs to include in a composition, I try to make it as hard as

⁷ A text only has meaning in relation to earlier texts. Intertextuality implies that texts no longer refer to reality, but only to other texts.

⁸ Many live by the words of Braque: 'I do not believe in objects, but in relations between them.' Many formal experiments in painting do illustrate a critique of representation: they try to breach the common meaning of the image. The formal experiment is not directed at similarity, but at differences.

⁹ Each text is, according to him [Derrida], written in the margin of other pre-existing texts

¹⁰ A new signifier is always needed in order to produce and reproduce the signified of a signifier.

possible, for me as for the viewer, for this process of rationalization to occur. This I do by choosing motifs whose meanings, in my estimation, diverge from each other as much as possible.¹¹ However, it seems that being the contemporary subjects we are, we can afford less and less time and space to rationalize images since the saturation of our lives by visual material seems to be escalating all the time.

Anyhow, I would like to achieve this function for the viewer using a lack of coherency; it fascinates me to think about how each gaze meets the image and the assemblage of motifs in a different, unique manner, for each one is informed by a different set of lived experiences, knowledge and sensibilities.¹² I, as the author of the composition, cannot resist the tendency to rationalize, especially once I finish it and start to observe it as a whole. Only then am I able to perceive fragments of the subconscious tendency to achieve narrativity or the consolidation of motifs, against my own will (as the author of the text).

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¹¹ One is confronted with a peculiar paradox: that which actually has no meaning – after all, nothing is there! – renders meaning to what is there.

¹² Writing is deemed to be dangerous, because the writer in principle loses every control over the text. The written word was therefore already seen by Plato as the prodigal son who goes his own way straying from the father or the origin, or more concretely, from the original intention of the author. One can cite at will from a written text and, in this way, violate the original meaning.



Luisa Pascu

Assignment: Text about own artistic work

Poststructuralist critical approaches to the text have indicated that there is no objective and exact language, free from ideological, cultural, gender, sexual, and other inscriptions of the subject, and therefore there is no completely original text. For this reason, I am interested in using materials that already have a fixed meaning within the society that surrounds me. In this text, I want to discuss the language of fashion and the body that wears it. Assuming nylon (pantyhose) is a material and symbol that represents conventional femininity, sex appeal, and tenderness, I want to try and see what happens when I place them in a new context when I reinterpret them. If we strip the nylons of their association with women's feet, what makes them feminine? If it is not the person who wears them, then I find the connection in the contradiction of thin, gentle, fragile with durable, tough, and stretchy. I am also fascinated by the inconsistency of the idea of dressing, hiding the body or material under the nylons, because it is not hidden but only painted in a new tone, thus revealing a new meaning. They silence, muffle, put in order, and collect something that is scattered. Are the contents which are beyond their reach rawer, truer, more revealing, and more vulgar? I use a sign to express something that is not there or something that is not shown. I transform this piece of clothing, stretch and injure it with staples, wood, my hands, trying to find the limits of its physical endurance and the limits of their function in which they represent and elevate beautiful female legs. Within this transformation, I feel that nylons are taking on a new meaning; the board they are fixed on, the wall behind that board are also changing. Suddenly my tactile and visual experience induce new thoughts and feelings of violence, protection, meat, aging, and rape. Processes are created within mutually talking materials, processes over which I have little control.

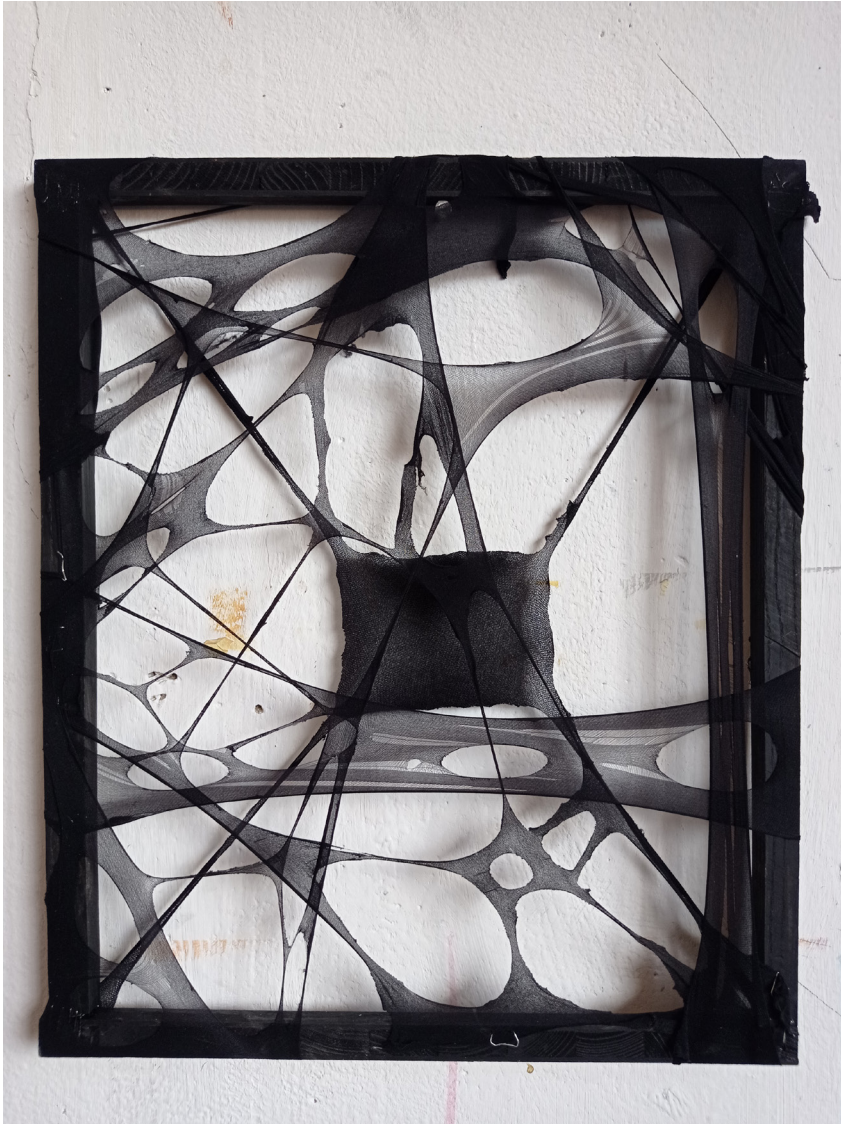
The goal of Derrida's research, simply put, is not to point out the fact that we prefer speech over writing) nor does he want to change this hierarchy, but he wants to reconstruct, shift contradictions to show that none is primary. With these works, I do not want to bring out the authentic in femininity, nor the authenticity in the materials I use. I don't want to find the perfect measure of femininity and non-femininity, nor the perfect combination of colors and materials. I want to see at what point of attachment to the subject we attribute to this ordinary material its power of description. Is it the moment I look at, wear, touch, tear or fix my nylons? Or when I see them in the shop window, when I see a photo on the packaging or the text next to the photo? What happens when I separate a garment from its body, and to what extent does the body remain inscribed in it? What happens when I bring the material (or sign) to the point beyond its recognition, when I ridicule it, or when I use it for the 'wrong' purposes? Why does the combination of these opposing materials (wood, nylons, sponge, metal) sometimes have an extremely appealing and sometimes disgustingly repulsive effect on the viewer? Why does it, at times, contain both at once? As is the case with the text,

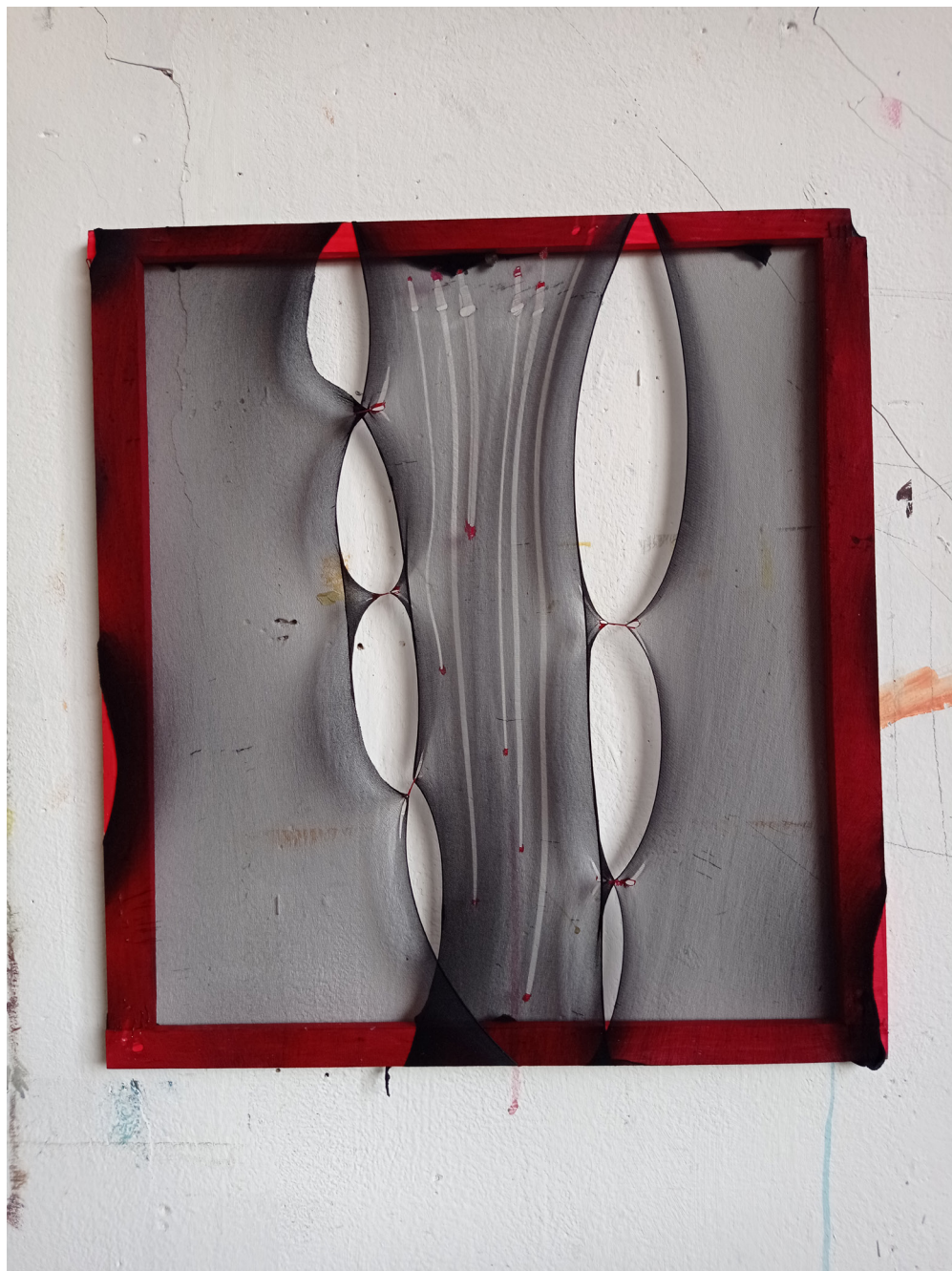
this work does not function without silences, allusions, indecision, which take place during the creative process and while I am watching what is being made. It's about tension – the tension between what this work is talking about and what is left unsaid, but crucial to it.

While working on this series I feel like an intruder, someone who has come to disrupt the logical sequence of thoughts related to the things we wear, find in a store or a magazine. I feel invasive as if I am quoting a text and thus violating its meaning.

Deconstructing, I can conclude that there is not one inherent meaning to express and to be found, but many, all co-existing in contradiction.

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Katarina Kocijan

Assignment: Text about own artistic work

In this text, we will look at Derrida, more precisely, the thesis of ‘language entering the material field of writing’ through a work I call Blue Nylon, which is not blue at all, and by moving the work to a darker or more colorful background loses all the blue it contains. It hanging by a yellow painters tape confirms its aesthetics and entry into space, from the field of a two-dimensional representation of an abstract *Image*.

The general task I see before me in my work is the search for the fabric of the text, the search for what a work can make present outside of itself. Visually, using (mostly) letters, and conceptually speaking about everything that is Text (texture), Scripture, Sign, Language.

This work was created completely ‘in passing’, i.e. in communication with the rest of my life and work, that is, those works that were primarily created through clear desires of what then seemed necessary to exist. Working in parallel on several works, in the hallway of the Academy of fine arts in Zagreb, Croatia (where an earthquake occurred recently that damaged many buildings, including the aforementioned), it was necessary to put something on the floor so that it would not get dirty, could be cleaned and ready when the annual final exhibition happens. The news was circulating about how we would be moving from Ilica 85 (the address of the Academy) soon, but not so soon. Cracks in the walls and a new distribution of used space took all the focus out of me – if I had never noticed every corner of every wall in the Academy before, now

I watched it very carefully, wanting to make my memory of Ilica 85 as clear as possible in a decade or further. Day by day, with such focus on the space around me, it became even clearer that it was time to abandon figuration and idea of the works I wanted to exist – and let the idea call me alone, not vice versa.

One day, my mentor showed me how to make letter stencils – thus speeding up the process of creating my ideas, or maybe I should say, visions. At least that's how I want to explain it to myself because that's what ultimately happened. The cardboard, with cut 'holes' in the shape of letters (dimensions: 100 x 70 cm), had to be coated with enamel so that it would stop being absorbent and was ready for more usage. So, I put the *nylon* (polythene sheet) on the floor, and the mentioned cardboard coated with enamel on both sides. Traces (prints) of the pattern (one smaller and the other larger) remained on the *nylon*. Suddenly I found myself in a situation where something that has emerged as a product of the physical reality I am in, and that was dirty nylon on the floor, is looking at me and waiting for me to notice how it says exactly what I am trying to come close to. I *made* a ready-made. Moving the nylon of the floor brought with it a great moment of discovery of what art, Writing, Language, or Sign meant at all. It suddenly became a lot clearer where else should I look for that Language that I am trying to create or discover, that impulse that I am trying to pass on to the one who is faced with the work I (might) create. Before we make the first move on a piece of paper, the first four are already there – and these are the margins of the page. Equally, it then became clear: before the work was created, its beginning was already there, somewhere in the space in which my body was inscribed, in the time in which the artist found herself. Plaster falling from the ceiling and useless classrooms wrote their writings, dictating what could not be created in the context of time and space, and only then what could be created, what would later dictate the possible aesthetics of what the work wants to say about itself. After moving the nylon from the floor to the wall, it became clear: Nylon is a Sign, traces of the Scripture pattern, and the overall context of time and space created a Language that could serve to Read that object in space. I consider it an object in space more than a two-dimensional *Image* that should just look good. That object does not know whether it was found or created. I believe in the independent life of a work of art after it was created, and *Blue Nylon* started its own before I had enough knowledge or wisdom to even notice its potential. It played games of signifying where before coming to the academy he was truly an average *workman's* polythene sheet (nylon), and then began its artistic life on the floor of the Academy of Fine Arts, to reach the peak of his career hanging on the wall. With himself, perhaps questioning the notion of communication, given the vague but almost legible letters he carries. If signifiers are the material carriers of every, or should I say the *very* language, then *Blue nylon* is just that – a raw signifier, ready to live its life as an artist, builder, waste, or writer. This nylon, inscribed in space vertically, not horizontally, has affirmed its place in the world of art as something that is not just a decoration or the result of a clear translation of an idea into physical space (paintings).

It seems to me, therefore, that in this very process (which lasted several weeks or months) it was precisely this Derridan deconstruction of speech and writing that

came to life. Not only from the mere fact that I usually work with writing in its artistic expression but from the pure *materiality* of the Blue nylon's life where the material field of writing, in which writing is not necessarily just a legible letter – in my opinion, has been successfully realized. Perhaps all the more so due to the fact that precisely because of these patterns and the affirmation of the Blue Nylon in the world of art, all the work began between communicating with each other, asking consequently of me to see in what other ways each one individually requires me to accomplish it. If nothing else, I felt in my very being how I managed to get closer/feel/look into the eyes of what was coming as a specific stimulus from which Derrida might have seen what was worth talking about. All this wisdom, science, or philosophy did not come by heart, it is alive among us and cannot be named any scarcer than by a multitude of (artistic) works (of art), books, essays, or similar attempts to approach something that eludes within language and speech and explains itself within itself. At the same time realizing the truth of this philosophy not through mere intellect but through a sense of space and life around him for what they are.

PHOTOS

Blue Nylon [Plavi najlon], cca. 178 x 107 cm, enamel and acrylic on polythene sheet





