



Investigation project

MIREIA SALLARÈS

KAO MALO VODE NA DLANU (UN PROJECTE SOBRE L'AMOR I SÈRBIA) EN COL·LABORACIÓ AMB HELENA BRAUNŠTAJN

The artist Mireia Sallarès (Barcelona, 1973) holds a BA in Fine Art from the Universitat de Barcelona and studied film at The New School university in New York. She works as an independent filmmaker and divides her time between Barcelona and a number of cities abroad, where she pursues her projects. Foreignness is an issue that features in much of her work, which has led her to explore violence, death, sex, legality and truth. Her recently shown work includes: *Literatura de replà* (Literature on the Landing), in the exhibition *Cómplices y testigos* (ADN gallery, 2014); *El Camion de Zahia* (Zahia's Lorry), in the exhibition *La realitat invocable* (MACBA, 2014); *Monuments* (CA Tarragona Centre d'Art, 2013); and *Se escapó desnuda* (She Got Away Naked) (Espai 13, Fundació Miró, Barcelona, 2012).

Kao malo vode na dlanu / Como un poco de agua en la palma de la mano (*Un proyecto sobre el Amor y Serbia*) (*Kao malo vode na dlanu / Like a Little Water in the Hand [A Project on Love and Serbia]*) is a research project that is part of Sallarès' *Trilogia de los conceptos basura* (Trilogy of Junk Concepts), which she began in 2011 to examine certain key notions (truth, love and work) that are essential to humans yet seem to have dropped out of use and to have lost their value and meaning today.

The research is conducted in Serbia and the surrounding area, a region that has been marginalised but is important in terms of geopolitical strategies. The project is based on the documentation of the experiences and conversations between Sallarès and the contemporary art researcher of Serbian origin Helena Braunštajn, who moved to Mexico during the Yugoslav Wars and returned to Serbia to work with the artist on this research into a vulnerable concept in a country marked by the corrosive effects in politics and relationships of the latest conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, nostalgia for its Communist past, its entry into ruthless capitalism and its attempts to join a European Union in crisis.

The project takes its title *Kao malo vode na dlanu / Como un poco de agua en la palma de la mano* from a popular expression in Serbian, Bosnian and Croatian about cherishing (cherishing a little water).

At the beginning, the impossible return of an exile to her now non-existent country (Yugoslavia) and her conversations with the artist, in addition to their joint reflections and shared interpretations of the concept of love, formed the substance of this research, this journey. Each encounter led to another encounter, another physical and conceptual shift in an inquiry caught in "the fog", according to Mirjana Miočinović, the widow of Danilo Kiš, a leading Yugoslav dissident writer who influenced Sallarès and Braunštajn. Through his writings, Kiš guided them through the complexity of lands with uncertain borders, constant fighting over territory and an enormous ethnic and linguistic diversity.

This project, like the lives lived, championed so often by Kiš and resurrected by Sallarès as heritage belonging to all of humankind, is also made of fragile, changeable moments.

"Every artwork speaks of love or death. There's no other subject." That is the opening comment made by the film director Žilnik – co-founder in the 1960s of the Black Wave of Yugoslav dissident film – in a conversation with Sallarès and Braunštajn while he cooked for them on the banks of the Danube.

One of Žilnik's films, *The Old School of Capitalism* (2009), is especially important for the project. This film deals with the impact of the privatisation of the once socialist factories carried out since the mid-1990s by the Serbian government in a process marked by impunity and irregularities. Some key laws were enacted during the war, which many took as an opportunity to do away with collective socialist property. This state of affairs has resulted in thousands of people losing their jobs and even their homes.

This subject has led Sallarès and Braunštajn to collaborate with the organisation Učitelj Neznalica (Ignorant Schoolmaster), named after the famous book by Jacques Rancière. This association consists of a self-education platform and a virtual library set up in 2011 that have drawn together various groups organised as an alternative to the current political and social set-up in Serbia. Učitelj Neznalica, which has been working for years, giving legal support to the struggle of workers who have fallen victim to privatisation, invited Sallarès and Braunštajn to organise a debate on love and work, one of the specific initiatives of this research in progress that will continue in two activities to be presented in Barcelona in early January 2015. The first of these will be on Thursday 8 January in the Llibreria Calders bookshop, where there will be a discussion concerning Danilo Kiš' influence on the understanding and tackling of the procedures and structuring of the project. At the second, to be held on Saturday 10 January at La Base in Poble-sec, the results of the debate in Belgrade will be considered, with an emphasis on those aspects of the research that may be relevant for a possible dialogue between the various forms of political activism.

