

Stranded Monuments²

Artists: Cristian Rusu (RO) & Michael Takeo Magruder (US/UK)

Curators: Diana Marincu (RO) & Horea Avram (RO)

Opening: November 10th, 2017, 20:00

Plan B Cluj

*Stranded Monuments*² brings together the work of artists Cristian Rusu and Michael Takeo Magruder. Blending Rusu's poetic explorations of anti-monuments with Takeo's virtual recreations of historic structures, the exhibition examines the notion of the "solitary monument" within the contexts of utopia and modernism in the former Eastern Bloc.

Rusu's long term project dedicated to anti-monuments implies from the very beginning a twisting of known reference points, towards a past which lies perpetually in front of us, superimposed over the present, in a slightly distorted perspective. The future looks ironically over our shoulder, as we struggle with the spectres of the past. The dialogue between the visible and the invisible is absorbed by interstitial spaces which the artist carves out of the solid block that is history, undermining its power to aggregate collective memory. Here, personal perception sculpts places and non-places populated with utopian residues, modernist fingerprints, and experiences of the sublime.

The pedestal of an invisible monument is situated in the middle of the gallery, conquering space through human sensitivity, just as Yves Klein imagined the transfer from Truth to Reality. The monumental fragment doesn't change the parameters of perception through its material dimension, but rather through its immaterial reality. It is not what we see that affects us, but precisely the unseen, growing towards infinity within the texture of phantom-space.

In contrast, Takeo proposes, through an artistic process of digital archaeology, an idealized visual reconstruction of the *spomenik*, Makljen, built in 1978 in the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and mostly destroyed in 2000 by unknown actors. Takeo's new recreation of this monument that now exists only as a skeletal remnant – a support structure merely indicative of bygone volumes – unfurls before us in real time, in a shared virtual space which is open to all. The decayed ruin from the real world is offered new life in a synthetic metaverse. A renewed, perfected iteration set atop an island rising from an endless virtual sea, aesthetically "textured" by the artist with new visual qualities and sounds.

What happens to a monument when it is abandoned, or when it simply becomes absent? What happens to a monument as a place of memory, of power, of message – that is to say, the monument as a "rhetoric space" – when it is stranded, and ceases to be the repository of a collective cultural heritage? Does memory become short-circuited? Does the past become "de-monumentalized"? Or is the monument totally annulled, along with the memory it bears?

Takeo and Rusu address these multi-layered questions, starting from images of monuments that have become – through their presence or their absence – recurring motifs of memory and its loss. To this end, Takeo's research photographs, architectural designs and virtual creations within this exhibition are significant, ordered as they are around the strange history of Makljen's concrete remains. These elements are informed by Rusu's bizarre, monumental construction of a "pedestal" that denies its own foundation, given that it has never known its monument. A pedestal which is itself a monument.

A utopian dimension is implicitly present in both these works. It is identifiable on the plane of residual politics, for every monument contains and articulates the political. But what occurs here is rather an instrumental approach to the political, in a critical fashion – the politics of failure, of ideological implosion, and of aborted memory.

Cristian Rusu (b. 1972, RO) is a visual artist and stage designer, and teaches at the Faculty of Theatre and Television of the “Babeş-Bolyai” University in Cluj-Napoca. His main artistic preoccupation is the investigation of space and the meditation upon ruin and the sublime. Through the use of techniques like drawing, photography, video, installation, and by combining spatial and architectural concepts, he explores the interaction between aesthetics, sensibility and ideology.

Michael Takeo Magruder (b. 1974, US/UK) is a visual artist and researcher who works with new media including real-time data, digital archives, mobile devices and virtual worlds. His practice explores subjects ranging from media critique and aesthetic journalism to digital formalism and computational aesthetics, deploying Information Age technologies and systems to examine our networked, media-rich world.

The encounter between these two artists, as well as the research underpinning this exhibition were made possible through joint funding by Arts Council England and British Council, and extensive support and collaboration with the Plan B Gallery in Cluj.

The exhibition is organized by the Cluj Cultural Center (CCC), as part of the ECCA 2017 – *Breaking Views* platform, and is supported by Arts Council England, British Council and Plan B Gallery.

Partners: The Paintbrush Factory, ColectivA.

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The exhibition is open between November 10th and December 10th, 2017
Plan B Gallery Cluj, The Paintbrush Factory, 59-61 Henri Barbusse Street