

SPLITTING OPEN THE PAVING STONES

By Maja Manojlovic

"We must believe in the body, but as in the germ of life, the seed which splits open the paving stones, which has been preserved and lives on in the holy shroud or the mummy's bandages, and which bears witness to life, in this world as it is." – Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, p. 173.

Tomb (2002), an installation by Nataša Prosenc, "splits open the paving stones" of our conventional Western understanding of life. Instead of representing the body - "the germ of life" - restricted within a linear continuum directed towards death, *Tomb* boldly acknowledges the pre-discursive, multifaceted nature of our embodied experience of life in "this world as it is." This experience is kinetic and reflexive, with Moebius strip-like dynamics, where life and death simultaneously contain and mirror one another.

Prosenc's installation conveys the complexity of this visceral yet transcendental experience through two simultaneous video projections of human bodies in motion: one framed by a window, with shadows passing on the inside of it, and the other projected on a cracked marble tomb, with shadows of human figures passing on its surface. The window opens up the space of the installation towards the "outside," the visible world of our conscious perception, whereas the cracked surface of the tomb suggests an encounter with the unknown and invisible world that can only be sensed by moving "inside," into our proprioceptive corporeal intelligence. This largely unconscious self-sensing process of the body ultimately triggers the transcendental to enter our conscious experience of a *life* as such.

Juxtaposed to the abstract movement outside/inside, Prosenc's two video projections further deconstruct the linearity of conventional experiential continuum by including vectors of movement in parallel and opposite directions. As shadows of human bodies from each of the "frames" move along or apart from one another, they multiply spatial layers of projected images and fill the space of the installation with kinetic energy and rhythm of *presence*. Such kinetics evokes the intensity of a simple being-in-the-world, where the meeting points between bodily and metaphysical, movement and world, life and death, are always already there, yet invisible to the naked eye. *Tomb*'s subtly layered spatiality thus opens up a contemplative dimension, where our visual perception folds into its haptic counterpart, exits the arbitrary confines of the conventional, allowing for a fresh and original experience of our *world* as it is.

These viscerally evocative spaces generated by Nataša Prosenc's installations are precisely what imbues her body of work with an expansive force that can only be likened to the force of life as such. Refusing to freeze her artistic expression in a "readable" metaphorical framework lending itself to a textual interpretive approach, the artist irreverently transgresses such "rational" common sense boundaries to express a world brimming with creative potentialities. It is therefore not surprising that, even though the title *Tomb* connotes death and finality, the installation itself transcends this conventional interpretation and instead develops the experientially based notion of *transition* and the transitory nature of a life in ceaseless flux.

Transition is organic to the artist's own life, as she has been crossing the Atlantic Ocean to go from her home in Slovenia to her other home in United States (and back) for the last ten years. It is therefore only natural that she has incorporated this notion into her creative process and developed it into one of her signature conceptual platforms. Transitioning, transgressing and transforming conventional referential networks of signification and experience infuse Prosenc's installations with a profoundly creative element of *expansiveness*.

This sense of expansion is largely due to the way her imagery and its placement deconstructs and reconfigures our intimate experience of embodied existence in the world. For

example, her installations *The Pillar* (1997) and *The Well* (2001) defamiliarize our culturally acquired sense of a clearly defined unitary self, experienced through skin-tight boundaries of the body. *The Pillar* intertwines limbs and various bodily parts of several bodies and thus expands the potentialities for different kinds of alliances between living beings, as well as for a re-imagined construction of the self. The concept of a single self thus opens up and multiplies into experiential assemblages of many micro-creative life forms, continuously reshaping their fluid boundaries. Conversely, *The Well* displaces a palpating heart muscle outside of an individual body, generating an experience of interconnectedness of humanity through our singularity, here represented by a *heart* that simultaneously belongs to anyone and no one in particular. At such points, Prosenč's art transgresses the boundaries of her assigned aesthetic space and creates new *concepts*, pregnant with potentialities. In the previously discussed installations for instance, she transforms our understanding of both the individual and the collective.

Besides breaking through the skin of the individual and morphing the idea of the collective, the author further expands our intimate horizons of the life-world as we know it by spiraling even further "into" the body, all the way to its cellular structures. She explores the body as a "germ of life" in its intrinsic interconnectedness with the natural world, specifically with the elements of water, fire, earth, and air. In *Sphere* (2001), to only name one example, a naked woman swims about in what seems like a large, water-filled globe. The swimmer is comfortably merged with the element of water, simultaneously prompting the viewers to breathe *for* her. The organic rhythm of breathing thus physically connects the swimmer's body to the body of the viewer. She now experiences her own embodiment in an expanded sense, with an awareness of the inter-relational nature of life forms at their elemental level of materiality. By revealing such raw and unprocessed potentiality of the body palpating with life, the art of Nataša Prosenč radically expands and deepens our notion of embodied experience. This artist dares to let the force of the body as a "germ of life" split open the confines of its utilitarian role in service of consumerism, unleashes its transformative kineticism, and allows it to creatively "bare witness to life in the world as it is." She gives us a gift of a world where art becomes the art of life.