

The variety found in Bojan Šarčević's work – specifically his capacity to explicitly reinvent himself – has led critics to categorise him as a conceptual artist. But this label carries its share of clichés. Above all, it tends to overlook one of the best qualities of the sculptor's works: their emotional power. The title of his recent fourth solo exhibition at the London gallery Modern Art sounded like an announcement: *Sentimentality is the Core*. Šarčević's ability to generate complex emotions, going so far as to mix politics with intimacy, the monumental with the trivial, minimalism with lyricism, is the common thread throughout the artist's body of work.

As such, this exhibition presents several industrial refrigerators, placed along the walls of the gallery's empty space. These *ready-mades*, monoliths of plastic and metal, blend into the white environment of Modern Art. Inside the freezers, nothing, no ice cream or side of beef, just emptiness, or, more accurately, only ice crystals and assortments of ice in abstract sculptural forms. Only some music – ghostly and faraway, mixed with the muffled humming of machines – fills the space. It is easy to pick out artists such as Sade, Billy Idol, Chaka Khan, and even George Michael from the soundtrack. These hits from the end of the 80s act as autobiographical hints. Born in 1974 in Belgrade, Bojan Šarčević grew up with this music. Even though he didn't live through the war (his family left Bosnia in 1991, several months before the start of the war) the ghostly power of the installation is troubling. The exhibition feels like an abandoned supermarket and transforms itself into a narrative machine, an anachronistic collision of teenage memories and the collective subconscious. For all that, *Sentimentality is the Core* does not claim to be a historical testimony. When asked about the origins of the project, the artist replies: "Everything comes from a situation that greatly influenced me. I was at Amsterdam airport. I had just gotten off a plane, around 11 pm. I needed to take a bus into town. There was no one around. It was cold, and I could see the moon. Everything was deserted. In front of the bus stop, I saw a dump truck, parked halfway up on the sidewalk, filled with trash bags. I could hear the motor running. The windows were down but there was no sign of a driver. A George Michael song was playing on the radio: "A Different Corner". This scene, this image of a machine, created a specific emotion in me, linked to a specific memory, and it really moved me. It lasted three minutes, it was sublime, and it really made me think. It was a moment of pure nostalgia. I'm 45 years old now, and I am constantly looking into the past. Where do I come from? Where am I going? Adolescence is a time when we become independent and we define ourselves, notably with music." Beyond this collision of references – between geopolitics, pop culture and art history; we think notably of the ready-made vacuums of Jeff Koons – an ambitious search for form plays out. Each refrigerator hides a speaker that plays music. The sound waves directly influence the structure of the ice crystals. These natural shapes interact with the industrial lines of the refrigerators in a macroscopic ballet slowed down by the cold.

When one looks at Bojan Šarčević's work, either his previous exhibitions at Modern Art or his proposal for the BQ gallery in Berlin, one sees that he uses very varied shapes and applies no set recipe. He agrees:

"I HAVE NO METHOD. EACH NEW PROJECT HAS ME STARTING AGAIN FROM ZERO. WHEN I WAS YOUNGER, THIS THOUGHT MADE ME PANIC; I DIDN'T HAVE THE KNOW-HOW OR A TECHNIQUE THAT I COULD APPLY AND DEVELOP AD INFINITUM. I HAD TO CONSTRUCT AN APPROACH THAT WAS ALL MY OWN. THAT SAID, I WASN'T INTERESTED IN FITTING MYSELF INTO A SYSTEM."

When asked if his inspiration comes while working in his workshop, he replies: "Some projects require large spaces and at other times, my kitchen table is sufficient." I split my time between Basel and Paris and I adapt to this mobility. For the past few years, my research has been split between my computer, a table, and the notes I take in a little book." This physical nomadism is translated by an aptitude for semantic displacement: "In my work, lots of things are built around recognition. When can we recognise something we don't understand?" This discrepancy plays out on several levels, sometimes simultaneously, but always in a poetic manner. With the two monumental sculptures *He* and *She*, Bojan Šarčević brings together the history of art with that of ancestral stone, playing with temporal scales. The two pieces are imposing blocks of onyx, a variety of agate in which circular and concentric bands form impressive motifs. Used as an ornamental stone and as a decorative object, onyx is formed by a very slow and complex transformation process, chemical reactions of loamy intercalations and of mineral oxides. In response to this work of nature, the artist made clear straight cuts that literally allow us to penetrate matter and time. These rectangular incisions recall the rigor of minimal art. The format of these works and their relationship to the human body resonates with the dimensions of the marble blocks used in ancient sculptures. Similarly, their titles give them an incarnation, almost as if they were representations of a far-off civilisation, far both in space and in time. When speaking of these pieces, the artist explains that he was questioning his relationship with images:

"A LITTLE LIKE I WAS ABLE TO DO WITH MY FILMS, WHERE I WORKED WITH 16MM FILM AND LITTLE SCULPTURES OR MODELS IN ORDER TO GIVE THEM A TEXTURE; HERE THE PRINCIPLE IS REVERSED. I WAS LOOKING TO FIND A PICTURALITY IN THE OBJECT. 'HE' AND 'SHE', IT'S PURE IMAGE, BUT IN SCULPTURE!"

Bojan Šarčević's work develops its lyricism in these blurred areas. Sometimes, it creates incongruous moments. As such, the press release for his exhibition *Invagination* is only one sentence long, which itself synthesises the artist's way of thinking:

“INVAGINATION REFERS TO THE IDEA OF SOMETHING BEING TURNED INSIDE-OUT, TURNED-IN, OR FOLDED BACK ON ITSELF.”

This facetious play on words showcases a spirit of creative flexibility, without going so far as to impose one reading at the cost of another: “I am not looking to construct a rhetoric; I don't think that the artist has ownership of the meaning of the world. In any event, I'm not trying to proclaim this meaning. I need to construct starting from the outside, from the outsideness of the world. It's a paradoxical idea, because it is as political as it is apolitical, and I try to integrate that into my pieces. I try to have a certain idea about the world, an intuition, but at the same time, I wouldn't be able to explain it. Essentially, I am not looking to produce an articulate or militant argument. I think that by watching or perceiving something, we are already giving meaning to that thing”. In this way, Šarčević unfolds a kaleidoscopic view, sweeping endlessly from the representational to the abstract, from the infinitely small to the immensely large, from common to singular, using practices that are as simple as they are ingenious.



Bojan Šarčević, *Sentimentality is the Core*, exhibition view, 21 November – 21 December 2018. Courtesy Bojan Šarčević & Modern Art, London © Bojan Šarčević