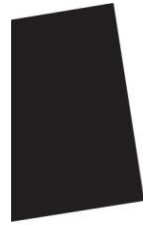


Jadranka Kosoric: COMMA06

Essay by Rebecca Geldard



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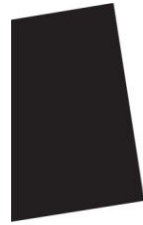
Jadranka Kosoric: COMMA06

On heads and shoulders

Jadranka Kosoric's spare and vital drawing practice operates at a curious, difficult-to-define distance from reality. Her real-life, real-time charcoal portraits of people pull one in different responsive directions: between the direct human encounter and a linear authorial dimension somewhat removed from the here and now. They describe elements of our day-to-day scrutiny of one another through a reductive graphic language redolent, perhaps, to that of a Picasso or Hockney drawing, or even the instructionally simplistic plates of a 'how-to' manual. The traditional job of the portrait – to capture a 'likeness' of the sitter – becomes a set of questions concerning identity and representation in Kosoric's distinctive handwriting. For the Croatian-born artist acknowledges, through her set up and execution of the human image, the limits imposed by the history of her chosen mode and its status within the wider technological flow of information.

For several years now Kosoric has been working on what she calls her '*Blind Date*' series: an ever-expanding set of 'ordinary' characters drawn from life. Each institutional slice of the project (from Artothek in Munich to The Wharf Road Project, London with David Risley and V22) has so far been defined by a subtly shifting set of rules. The actual relationship between artist and sitter is only ever as long as it takes to complete each image. Participants are openly recruited: invited to pose, for one to three hours, through different advertorial strategies – from the flyer to the 'free ad'. Interested parties are asked, like the prospective candidates for a date, to submit a photograph (nothing else) from which Kosoric then makes an intuitive decision about whether or not to draw them. Her visual selection is not, she assures, informed by the desire to represent particular people or social groups, but the elusive notion of a connection – if and how this might emerge through the experience. And it's a process inevitably punctuated by failure, for whatever this alchemical state is that exists between persons, it cannot be manufactured. Kosoric is a ruthless editor, frequently discarding works, regardless of their appearance, when 'it', the "something fading in the very moment of its occurrence"¹ just doesn't materialise.

Post-Pop, the portrait has offered artists an interpretive space within which to explore definitions of reality – whether an Earthly sense of being present or a phenomenon mediated through technology. Following Warhol's screenprinted icons of the cult of celebrity and Richter's painterly vibration of the representational skin¹ between subject and artwork, one can no longer take the source of a realistic human image for granted. Kosoric, unlike the majority of contemporary artists



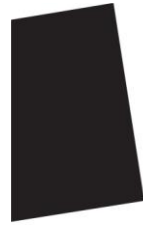
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using the portrait as a conceptual framework – Elizabeth Peyton, or Marlene Dumas, for example, who reinterpret the human experience as distorted by the (media) lens – does not appear at pains to situate the genre within the present technological landscape. She presumes, perhaps, that the viewer will bring their cultural points of reference to the image. With Kosorcic's allusions to the dating process and passport-photo framing of subject, the screen, by default, is everywhere. Yet, encountering these line-drawn faces one after another often brings to mind the commuter experience over a random shuffle through JPEG'd tribe affiliates online.

For the current series, the corporate confines of Bloomberg have offered a tighter control group. During her brief residency, the practicalities of business have prevented Kosorcic from simply approaching employees she likes the look of to ask if they'll sit for a portrait; she has had to wait patiently for them to respond to a mail-shot call. But this has proved something of a fur-covered hurdle, for such restrictions seem to suit the testsite premise of the project and the artist's minimalist sensibility – a restless, almost scientific search for the least means required to induce maximal human response. Portraiture covers such a vast intellectual territory that one can understand the necessary imposition of limits. And in a world awash with endlessly reproducible imagery limits seem like a good thing. Looking back over the past incarnations of Kosorcic's *'Blind Date'* one can almost detect a rising sense of pressure, a sub-audible noise produced as the constraints (on materials, production, time) tighten around the project like a rock compressed – the sonic secrets of the human condition.

The formality of the scenario situates Kosorcic in the arena of the shrink or clairvoyant, and there is more than a whiff of the confessional about the meetings she describes, upon enquiry. She has been surprised by the histories of people moving through the environment – unlikely tales of Olympian ambitions at odds, perhaps, with corporate titles – like discovering the true pronunciation of a word you've had echoing around your head. Kosorcic's 'studio' for the duration is some distance from the beating techno heart of this Ballardian behemoth of a building. It's a quiet, rather characterless place for a meeting, perfect for her context-free studies of the human form. We discover the figure in pictorial limbo not in situ. Time has proven it's often the human back stories that attract one to an image of another person – be they a religious icon, artist patron or the latest micro celebrity. However, Kosorcic is less concerned with her rendering of the individual than the experience of meeting them. While other contemporary artists tend to use the portrait as an historical construct through which to explore particular issues, highlighting the subjectivity of the person depicted as if evidence of an endemic cultural symptom (think Cindy Sherman, or Gillian Wearing), for Kosorcic, the process is the point. The anthropo-, socio- or psychological clues she may unearth are simply an inevitable part of this. Given the spare nature of Kosorcic's deft handling of each individual, naturally one wonders what more there might be to learn about her Identikit people were the background and other details 'filled in'?

The umbrella title for the series, *'Blind Date'*, is entirely fitting – the subtle shift person to person as one moves around the gallery describing, in part perhaps, the thrill of the chase. This is no love story, cartoon flick-book evocation of the compulsive anxiety that clouds the first meeting, but



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Kosorcic's "Ever fixed mark(s)"ⁱⁱ, charcoal under a thin adhesive skin, signify unwavering human commitment nonetheless. Though each member of this new family of works might be assimilated in a matter of minutes, Kosorcic's intensity of making demands close scrutiny from the viewer. The bust portion of each person is imbued with a fragility that implies talking around the subject yet rendered with a directness of application that implies nailing it. Occasionally one is given associative leave from the linear leash to imagine a scrubby sense of something else, the vampiric ordeal implied by the artist's capture softened here and there by a smudge. But Kosorcic rarely uses tone as an atmospheric tool – except as a means of blocking in the darkness and covering up the odd mistake. The less one is given, it would seem, and the more one searches to find some evidence of 'truth'. While any narrative details interpreted by the viewer will inevitably orbit the realms of fiction each image operates in the manner of a two-way mirror, revealing facets of the artist and ourselves: the vain preoccupation with others' perception.

"When you're trying to do a portrait of somebody else, you look very hard at them, searching to find what is there, trying to trace what has happened to the face. The result (sometimes) may be a kind of likeness, but usually it is a dead one, because the presence of the sitter and the tight focus of observation have inhibited your response," says John Berger in the seminal 'The Shape of a Pocket'ⁱⁱⁱ. Kosorcic, however, circumvents the futility of this truism by challenging the portrait artist's brief. Rather than try to substantiate the genre's historical relevance to the present she has simply adapted the terms of the artist-sitter deal to suit her internal directive "to find things out". In actively managing the artificiality of the situation she effectively acknowledges that each exchange is a potentially corruptible set of circumstances peculiar to sitter, artist and setting. Of course it's a conceit, attempting to convey anything more than a technical resemblance to the subject, but what happens when you strip away the messy human problems associated with the muse and the benefactor?

Rebecca Geldard

Rebecca Geldard is a writer based in London.

ⁱ This quote is of particular personal significance to Kosorcic. It is taken from Steven Shaviro's 'Doom Patrols: Theoretical Fiction About Postmodernism', ch. 8, p.121, 1997, Serpent's Tail, New York.

ⁱⁱ See Shakespeare's sonnet 116.

ⁱⁱⁱ 'The Shape of a Pocket', John Berger, ch.12, p118, Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, London, 2001.