

# CUKRARNA

Press Release

Ljubljana, 11. 6. 2024

## **ADRIAN PACI: *Waves & Gazes***

Curated by: Pierre Bal-Blanc

19. 6.–13. 10. 2024

**On Wednesday, June 19th, at 7:00 PM, we will open an exhibition by the Albanian artist Adrian Paci, who lives and works in Milan, Italy, titled *Waves and Gazes*, at Cukrarna.** The artist will also join us at the opening. The exhibition *Waves and Gazes* offers an insight into Adrian Paci's artistic practice, characterized by video installations. The exhibition of the artist's paintings on the first floor of Cukrarna is complemented by works from Ivana Kobilca, Edi Hila, Ferdinand Paci, and Deborah Imogen Beer. In the basement exhibition space, the newly created video production *The Bell Tolls Upon the Waves* will also be on display.

*The exhibition is supported by: Italijanski kulturni inštitut / Istituto Italiano di Cultura di Lubiana and Cinemazero.*

*The producer of the video The Bell Tolls Upon the Waves is Giorgio Pace Foundation, with co-production by Cukrarna Gallery.*

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The artistic practice that Adrian Paci has been developing over the last thirty years is marked by his spectacular video installations, whose protagonists have a presence that has few equals in the video production of recent decades.

The purpose of the exhibition of paintings on the first floor, which runs concurrently with that in the lower gallery in the basement, presenting *The Bell Tolls Upon the Waves*. Adrian Paci's latest video production, is to explore the archaeology of the artist's gaze through various contexts that have shaped it, from his childhood in Shkoder, his years of study in Tirana and his master's degree in liturgy in Milan, all the way to the context of the present exhibition in Slovenia, a country bordering on Balkan culture.

One of the presumptions that this exhibition at Cukrarna in Ljubljana aims to put forward is that this filmic singularity has its origins in the transmission of pictorial practice to which Adrian Paci was exposed from an early age.

The trauma of losing his father, Ferdinand Paci (a well-known painter on the Albanian academic scene under the Communist regime), when he was a child, helped him to transform the legacy of this practice into a true process of sublimation. However, it was not in painting that he rediscovered the visual shock of his childhood, but rather in his daughter's video (*Albanian Stories*, 1997), recounting with the language and gestures of a child the events that were no less traumatic, associated with the terror that followed the fall of the Albanian dictatorship in 1997. This first video work was like a revelation for him, distancing him from the direct vision imposed by his pictorial heritage, allowing him to approach his subject indirectly, without being blinded by his heredity.

After several video installations presented at international events, Adrian Paci has returned in recent years to a pictorial practice that formed the basis of his artistic training at the Tirana Academy of Fine Arts from 1987 to 1991, under the regime of the People's Socialist Republic of Albania.

The exhibition on the first floor is focused on Adrian Paci's series of paintings, whose main characteristic is that they all stem from an indirect or third-party mediated gaze. In other words, the artist selects images from the continuum of existing film or video sources that were not produced by him (such as extracts from films by P.P. Pasolini or amateur videos of ceremonial occasions) and reproduces them in paintings using a technique of systematised brushstrokes.

In order to highlight the indirect gaze that underlies the artist's pictorial corpus – of which the *La Cappella Pasolini*, borrowed from the permanent collections of MAXXI in Rome, forms part – the exhibition seeks to confront this indirect gaze with a number of biographical, contextual, social and historical sources emanating from other painters who contrast with Adrian Paci's pictorial approach by expressing, on the contrary, a direct gaze towards their subject.

The strong presence of anthropomorphic figures that inhabit the first-floor gallery contrasts with the artist's latest video production, emptied of its inhabitants, in which an isolated bell on the Adriatic Sea, replays the sound of mermaids to the rhythm of the waves. Or perhaps the complaint of drowning men victims of a tragic journey into exile?

**–Pierre Bal-Blanc**