

Images always on the edge. A conversation

Ana Petrović and Luca Vargiu

[L.V.] The Academy of Arts and Culture in Osijek represents a privileged observatory for engaging with Croatia's vibrant contemporary art scene. This is due to its distinctive approach, which closely combines cutting-edge theoretical research, especially in the domain of image theory and visual studies, with free and curious artistic experimentation, both in more traditional forms of expression and in those more closely linked to new media.

Ana Petrović (<https://ana-petrovic.com/>) is a prominent figure within this dynamic milieu, indeed a true "creature" of the Academy in Osijek, having been first a student, then a teaching assistant and finally a senior assistant of Multimedia and Intermedia. In the fall of 2025, she was granted the opportunity to participate in an academic exchange at the University of Cagliari as a visiting professor, within the framework of the Erasmus+ program. It was during this visit that we agreed on the idea of conducting a conversation focused on some of her works linked by a very specific common thread: that concerning the relationship between image and its edges, boundaries, or limits.

Luca Vargiu – I am very grateful to you for this conversation, Ana. I propose that we commence with a preliminary introduction. When I asked you how you would like to be introduced to the audience at your seminars in Cagliari, you indicated that you would prefer to be defined as a visual artist rather than, say, multimedia artist. That's how you have chosen to present yourself on your personal website and social media profiles. To elaborate further, your website states that you examine

«visual elasticity of different kinds of media»¹. Could you please explain the reason behind this choice?

Ana Petrović – Well, maybe the answer is far less complicated than you would like it to be, because there could be a plethora of reasons why I consider myself a visual artist. I would like to remind that in previous decades and centuries, the last centuries especially, if an artist would study art, they would study to be an academic painter or academic sculptor (whatever academic means) and in the end, you would encapsulate your practice and yourself basically into one medium.

Today the art scene is much more diverse than simply putting an artist into a specific medium, and for my specific practice I do have so many different media I work with. It would be very practical for me to say that I'm a multimedia artist, whose literal meaning would be that I deal with different media, but, looking at the way the word has been used so far, it mainly refers to artists that use video and photography, which is what I have done in recent years. It is true that I use mainly video and photography, but I also deal with different versions of it. They correspond with space and installation a lot actually, and I cannot just remove all the other media that have maybe been neglected for a couple of years, but they have been and still are in my life. So, that's why I say I'm a visual artist: because I deal with visual media instead of just one.

L.V. – The difference between the various media is certainly something to bear in mind. I remember you once asserting that photography and especially video have a closer and, arguably, more critical relationship with the medium in comparison to, say, painting or other more “traditional” artforms. That is, a work of video art can be considered as both a work of art and a critical perspective on medium itself, involving a struggle or a war against the medium. As you noted, this stands in contrast with painting, for example, where such a phenomenon is not always evident, or perhaps only rarely occurs. From this perspective, what does working primarily with video and photography signify to you?

¹ A. Petrović, biography in <https://ana-petrovic.com/bio/> (last visit 15/02/2026).

A.P. – My most recent work almost exclusively deals with what an image is through the lens of the camera, which is, of course, always a tricky question. Photography, especially video, is a newer medium and it's always interesting to revisit the lessons of what art is and what art can be in a medium that is not very well established. Of course, video exists from nineteenth century in the form of film, but it was very, very hard to make it, because cameras were very, very expensive. And until recently, it was not expected that anybody could have a photography machine and deal with photography. Especially for me, when I was growing up, I did almost no photography. I actually started to do photography and video when I began studying, because I didn't consider it as an expressive medium on its own.

Interestingly, when I was researching a little bit throughout the years, I found out that Simmel said that photography is not really an artistic medium at one point, which was wrong, of course, but in that time, in that period, in that kind of thought of what art can be – which is a very flexible thing through the centuries – what art is and what art can be is dependent on our point of view. So, we determine the meaning of stuff. We as a collective, whoever "we" is, because there are always people that disagree with something, which is actually a very good thing. So, as Simmel said, photography cannot be really art. Why did he say that? It's a curious thing, right? Because anything and everything visual can be art, at least visual art, as we consider it today. Well, in his thought, photography and looking through the lens is a special kind of thing, because it's the closest thing to reality.

L.V. – Thank you for this reference to Simmel. Indeed, even at the dawn of the twentieth century, this perspective was still widespread, after having found illustrious advocates in the previous century, such as Baudelaire and Fiedler, to name but two. Simmel was willing to acknowledge a "consistency of reality" in pictorial and graphic images – *Realität*, to employ the German term – albeit distinct from actual reality – *Wirklichkeit*. Photography, in contrast, as a mechanical «copy of actual reality» – what Peirce identified in the same decades as its indexicality –

«does not belong to the abstract order of art» (Simmel 2010: 145; Simmel 2005: 167 fn. ii).

However, the subsequent debate shifted towards a separation of artistic aspects from semiotic and medial components, without making the latter, concerning the way photographic and video images reproduce reality, dependent on the former. In this manner, the inquiry on the medium is left to the earlier mentioned struggle against it. You too, in your personal battle against the medium, have encountered very often the question of the relationship between reality as perceived by the human eye – let us still call it actual reality – and reality as captured by the camera's lens. Right?

A.P. – Of course, reality is a question of how we see. If a blind person or half-blind person, for example, sees the world differently, then is that reality? What is their reality? What do they think about reality? Is their reality wrong? Well, probably not, because it's their version of reality. Do we see especially well? Well, maybe me, with my glasses, I can see well. So, we all use our own versions of reality. And of course, I'm talking here about the machines, about the fact that they act as extensions that help us see. But the thing is, we don't see with our eyes, we see with our brain, and our brain interprets the content of the things that surround us. But what does camera do? Camera does this special little thing, because it's a machine, it doesn't think, it doesn't have a brain, it only has an eye. So, the important thing is what you do with that eye.

For example, I was recording a photo yesterday evening and I thought that the framing was very, very pretty. I pointed my camera exactly at what my eyes were seeing and the photo was horrible. It was not good. The lighting suddenly felt strange and the composition was completely off. My eyes were telling me a different view. But then I tried to look with the machine's eye because it doesn't look the same as my eyes! Consider everything around the image. They include all knowledge of the scene around the shoot: the building behind, the sound, the background that looks different depending on the depth of field in the photo, knowledge of everything outside of this frame. There is also the element of time, which photography doesn't have. And so, you have all this knowledge in your brain, and your brain is making a mashup of all this different information.

Also, by the way, the mashup is very different from person to person, of course, because it's a personal experience which somebody in the field of psychology would maybe elaborate better on this part.

How the camera looks at things when you are a beginner with photography is also a good example, you are very acutely aware that what you think would be best, actually doesn't turn out so good. And when you're a beginner, you kind of think, okay, but that's just because you don't know photography – partially yes, but partially not – because the image in our head is quite different looking than through the lens of the camera because our brain holds more information, and more subtle information about everything is included. Sometimes the brain includes information that is not actually there. It's only our knowledge of things existing in a place, we hold many images all at once from walking through space and time. The camera is ruthless. It's a ruthless medium. It does not include more than it's supposed to see. So, in the end you get a horrible image and then you must think, okay, so maybe this framing is not a good idea, or maybe it doesn't work in general. Maybe you should give up on the idea and then you try to search for a different frame and then you see, okay, so yes, maybe this works. So, my point is that the eyes of a human being and the eye of the camera are two completely different things.

L.V. – I agree, and this touches on a salient issue within the domain of photography theory. It is the issue of the so-called optical or photographic unconscious, a theme that was particularly investigated by the Italian photographer Franco Vaccari, who passed away recently. But, as you are aware, this was a theme previously explored by, among others, Walter Benjamin and Rosalind Krauss². However, let us save that discussion for another time, because it would take us too far away from the main topic.

What you have said so far is enough to substantiate a judgment about you made by Krešimir Purgar. According to Purgar (2022: 11), your works «deal with key problems of visual cognition of reality: the limit of man's field of vision, the role of media-mediated images in the

² See Vaccari 2011; Benjamin 2005; Krauss 1993.

demarcation of reality and representation, and the difference between reality and its image transmission». From this perspective, one of your main features is «problematizing physical space in relation to the space bounded by image media». It seems to me that your interest in the frames, boundaries, and edges of the image can be incorporated into this problematization, can't it?

A.P. – I started to work with frames and borders because I was doing artistic research. It was quite informal and I was just reading a book entitled *The Weight of Photography*, edited by Johan Swinnen and Luc Deneulin³. It's a good collection of essays about photography. When I finished the book, I was really sure that there was a lot of data there that confirmed my previous thoughts about photography and video and its relation to space and reality. During the reading of the book, the idea of the importance of frames and borders was basically born then. I think I started to read it in 2018 the first time and I thought while reading it that photography and video are the perfect mediums to exemplify the importance of the frame, because you can have a painting that has nothing to do with borders or margins or frames or anything of that sort. So, you can say, okay, the middle part is important and let's forget about the edges – although I would not agree with that, but you could go in that direction.

But for photography and for video, all there is to the creative process, or the most important thing is the edge. So, if I go out of frame during a video I would just simply not be here. Maybe my voice would be here, but it's very important where this little camera is pointed, and what is excluded from it. And so, I was starting to think about the exclusion of things in photography, which is, I'm not the first person to think about that, but it's impossible to show in the photo what you are excluding, because the moment you include the thing, it's not excluded anymore. So, I started to think, okay, so maybe it's not that I can show the exclusion of things, but maybe I can more acutely be aware or make the viewer aware of the exclusion itself. And there we start with borders.

So, that's why I'm saying that photography and video is the perfect medium for talking about borders and edges, because it's inherently a

³ See Swinnen, Deneulin 2010.

medium that deals with the border immediately. The moment you pick up the camera, you work with the borders.

L.V. – No surprise, then, that the exhibition whose catalogue features Purgar's text was held in 2022 at the Gallery Knifer in Osijek and was entitled *Na rubu / On the Edge*. A series of four photographic images created in 2018 also shares this title, *On Edge* (Fig. 1). Could you please talk about it?

A.P. – When I started to do this whole series, the first one produced was *On the Edge*. It started quite a bit earlier. The first version was created in 2016, but I was not entirely satisfied with the result. So, I continued two years later, and the final result was called *On Edge*. This is inkjet print: a series of four where I am standing, this is of course me a long time ago with red hair, standing on the edge of photography itself. And the thing is, I was thinking of making a sort of an anti-postcard here – you know, the old things that old people used to send to their families to say, «I'm great mom, don't worry, the sun is shining, the weather is beautiful, I'm bathing, my tent is so nice». And I was thinking of doing the opposite of that, because behind me in every single photo is actually a river that is important here – in Osijek and in Graz. Back then I had a stipendium for residency in Graz, and Graz is a really big, beautiful city. Osijek is, I would say, a pretty city too, but I've chosen sites that are not usual on postcards. And the thing is, in both cases, the river is behind, so sometimes you see it, sometimes you don't, but the river is always there, although it's not very visible. Graz is a wonderful, wonderful city, but mostly you don't see this kind of thing on postcards.

L.V. – Sorry to interrupt. But the image format, 93x120, is significantly different from that of a postcard, isn't it?

A.P. – Absolutely, the end result are photos quite bigger than the postcard format, and it makes sense because the postcard's purpose is to show off the beauty of the city in a small, post office friendly way. Mine are not to be sent but to be seen in a gallery. And since there is no composition in a classical sense, I wanted to make them a bit bigger in

order to give the viewer an opportunity to explore the details of the quiet landscape.

L.V. – How is the intention to create an anti-postcard related to the focus on the edges?

A.P. – So, this is my point of bringing something that is already the edge of urban life and emphasizing the edges of a photo itself. I have chosen this area, it could have been anything else, and it's maybe something very usual, but also, I'm suspecting that this kind of imagery is not very often seen, here. So, for you, it's a little bit different and not so usual to see it. It depends on who is watching the image: the meaning is always coming from your perspective as a viewer. So, you, as a viewer or a consumer of art, are never passive in that kind of sense, because you add the last element to the work.

L.V. – The investigation on edges questions, among other things, a more conceptual boundary, namely that between image and object, or between work and object. In this sense, W.J.T. Mitchell (2015: 16) introduces the key distinction between “image” and “picture”, asserting that «the picture [...] is the image as it appears in a material support or a specific place». Based on this distinction, we might inquire whether the edge in question pertains to the image or to the object or, if you prefer, to the image or to the picture. It appears to me that your three-dimensional work entitled *A Place that does not Exist* (Fig. 2) addresses this issue. For, in this case, the image's edges coincide with those of the tendentially cylindrical object that displays the image. What is your perspective on this work?

A.P. – I played with a simple idea that an image, besides having an edge, is basically its own version of flat representation. The problem with image is not only that it has edges, so the specificity of an image is its enclosure into a certain frame of reality, whatever reality means. It's also important to mention that we perceive images, especially photography, as something that is representative of reality. If we say that an image doesn't have a filter or it wasn't in Photoshop, then it's reality. But in fact, that is wrong because context is everything to an image.

There's a famous example in photography, where there was a kind of reportage from a part of a festival, and every year there was a guy with a plastic gun that was waving it through the air. He was a little quirky person, but everybody knew him, it wasn't a problem. It was a problem only when a bigger news outlet picked up on the news and saw the plastic gun in the images. Before, when it was in a local newspaper, everybody knew what was happening. So, when it was picked up by bigger newspapers, it was taken out of context, so it blew up into this big cover story. They had to debunk the whole thing, but it was too late. The photo has already charged the world and the newspapers.

So, we must have a context for an image every single time. It's very important, but also in this specific work. I was thinking about how an image is very specific in relation to reality, that it's 2D, not 3D. And that's very important because the image is an important milestone in prehistoric art. I'm not talking here about music, as it's very hard to talk about prehistoric music, but in a sense of images, the shift between the first figurines that were natural to us, almost an instinct, and the first images. That was a real revolution. When you think about it, it is not an easy task to be the first person that sees an antelope or a deer and then to make it on the wall. So, that was a real revolution, to think in 2D. So, from that, we have evolved into a species that makes images and thinks about them in a way that they are almost more natural to us.

When you scroll down social media and you see the most recent trends, among them: "Let's romanticize our lives". Have you seen it? Because life deserves to be romanticized and the mediascape is sometimes a hellish space. And romanticization of our lives is now looking at the videos, pretty videos of simple things in life. And that is a very important thing.

When I first came up to that concept, I thought, okay, this is very beautiful but at the same time a little bit sad too, because if we see the world only through the lens of the camera, and we are not aware what the camera does to our lives, that can be a very dangerous thing, because if you walk through life thinking through the lens of camera, then you're not a human being, you're a photographer or a videographer on a job. So be very, very careful how you romanticize your life.

To go back to this piece of work, the concept was very simple. I would be in places through the city, so urban area, and I would try to touch the edge of the image, but this time, the edge of the image will be an object. So, what happens when you turn a 2D image into 3D image? As it turns out, I have short hands. So, I elongated them to make the object really 3D. The biggest one was somewhere around my shoulders, but the smallest one was somewhere around my knee. Little me, not so little me, but all the proportions are wrong and that also changes the image in its own way. Proportions, size, according to your body, are extremely important when you're looking at art.

L.V. – Again, in the article already mentioned, Purgar (2022: 11) offers a general perspective, stating that «we perceive image media in everyday life as a way to transform three-dimensional physical space into two-dimensional and then “transferred” or, better said, represented, in another place and at another time». This is precisely the kind of shift you highlighted, recalling its beginning in prehistoric art. In contrast, a work such as *A Place that does not Exist* accomplishes the opposite, in the sense that it transforms a two-dimensional image into a three-dimensional picture. However, this entails not only a different relationship with space, but also a transformation in our experience and vision. As with any installation, in which – to reiterate Brian O’Doherty’s well-known dichotomy – not only the «eye» is involved, but the «spectator» in his/her bodily nature⁴, to truly experience the work, one must be in the specific space of the gallery where it is exhibited, walk and pass by it.

A.P. – Seeing art in real life, not on screens, is quite important. For example, seeing an image on my screen is quite different than seeing a huge image on projection or people at home because we don’t know how much light or dark or even what kind of monitor they have at home. We don’t know that. So maybe they see quite differently. But there is something to be said about going to a venue that is prepared for viewing objects, we engage our bodies into the process and the object changes

⁴ See O’Doherty 1999: 35-64.

through that. Documentation of art and experiencing art are two separate things.

L.V. – Of course, that's why it is important to see art not through digital interfaces but in real life – whatever "real" life means. But then, what is the "place that does not exist"?

A.P. – The name of the work comes from the fact that the image of places I marked with my presence and with the camera, places that are all urban living areas, after photographing are not those places anymore, they are a mere mirror image, flat, immobile. And then, after my futile attempt to bring back 3D, they are even more distorted, even further away from the initial place.

L.V. – Let us redirect the discourse to the problematization of «physical space in relation to the space bounded by image media». It seems to me that, in some of your works, this problematization concerns not only the relationship between the space in which the spectator, or their eye, is located and the internal space of the image, which is more or less framed, but always separated from the external environment. Sometimes, what emerges in the foreground is precisely the edge itself, in its function of delineating the internal spatial domain. In *On Edge*, your figure positioned in profile at the left and right edges of the photo assumes the role of a "figure of framing", as Marin (2001: 357-358) terms it, albeit in reverse. Rather than serving as a deictic marker pointing to the inside of the frame, that is, to what is framed, it indicates the presence of the edges and emphasizes their impassability. However, if we refer to the video entitled *Cutting*, it can be said that it is the whole action that constitutes a reverse "figure of framing" (Fig. 3, <https://youtu.be/kuPWZUzWv3w>). How did the idea of this video come about?

A.P. – Video artists have a little bit of a problem. That's the only medium that can be properly shown on social media, so you can steal it quite easily. Photography is in a little bit better position. So now on the link you're seeing is an online version, so it's not stealable. The shorts, of course. So, we don't have the whole image as it exists for gallery and festivals.

In the video I'm of course playing with the edge of the image. This image is made easily. The only digital intervention into the footage that was made is almost as old as film is, and that is the process of cutting the video. Thus, the name of it, *Cutting*.

Of course, I couldn't hit the edge of the video with the ball every time, and in real space, I was not sure where the edge of the frame was, especially if I am in the video. I cannot know where my reality stops and where it stops on the camera. So, I was trying to hit the edge of the frame, but really, it's impossible. So, I had to do a post-production, but I did it the old-fashioned way as much as possible. And, of course, you probably don't know the yellow flowers that extend into infinity in the background. This is how we get sugar. This is the flowering phase of a root, a kind of turnip. So, this is a future sugar (= sugar beet).

And for me, it was quite important to make the video on the principles of a studio making background, but with nature. So, to not be in a studio, an artificial place and to really be in nature, which is kind of the opposite of art, because ... I don't know, what's the word in Italian for "art"?

L.V. – It is "arte".

A.P. – *Arte*, the same, yes. Did you know that in Eastern Europe, starting with Bulgaria, ending with Russia, the word for art is "experience" (изкуство, искусство)? And the interesting thing is that we never think about it. On Croatian, it's *umjetnost*, which is basically a translation of "art". Art – artificial, so not from nature, something man made, so "art-ificial". And that is the distinction in the West, how they perceive art. In the East, they perceive it as something to be experienced. Of course, we are both right, I think. So, we do experience art, but we also make art. But that is the reason why Duchamp had appeared in the Western civilization first and foremost, because we consider art something to be made.

Therefore, it was important for me to find a place in nature that could have this little curve, which is very typical for studios so that you don't see the edge of the wall. And the place where I come from is an extremely flat place. There are no mountains and no hills. This is probably one of the rare examples where land is curving up a little bit. And the hill that produces

sugar had perfect scenery for this. Luckily, the flowers were not too high, otherwise you would not see me. So, this is the basis of production.

L.V. – What struck me is that you created a vertical version of this video, applying further "cutting", this time not in the sense of the post-production, as you previously explained, but in the sense of cropping the frame to ensure the video's compatibility with mobile phone screens (<https://youtube.com/shorts/5ewydN4Kf9s>). Noteworthy, we typically hold mobile phone screens vertically, that is, not in "landscape" mode but in "portrait" mode.

A.P. – Most of the TVs that you are looking at are not prepared, regarding the image, for a lot of movies that you are watching at home. They are prepped for a big screen.

One funny fact is that when the screens started to be in this ratio that we are very accustomed to now, which is 16:9, it was very strange for movie directors. They didn't know what to do with this elongated screen, as they called it. At first, it was very strange for them, but for example, Westerns are one of the typical ones that introduced these large landscapes that are now the norm and weren't normal before, because they thought, okay, so maybe we can use this extra space that we have gained and show off a little bit of the nature. And now we have it as a normal thing to have a small human in a part of a big scenery. But we are also now seeing a different measurement.

So, if you have a box of a mobile phone horizontal, we don't use it that way. It's strange in our hands. We use it vertically, right? That changes the perspective. The online version of the *Cutting* was cut so that it is playable in vertical format on your phones. So, it's not a real version of how it was shot, because the real version shows off the whole field more.

So, "landscape" and "portrait" mode are very different in recording. And I was shying away from making that version of the video for years. I didn't want to make it. At the end, I decided, okay, maybe if I cut a little bit more and make a really short version of the short version, it could work for a mobile phone too. So, every time we change the kind of aspect ratio or a context in which we are looking at images, especially moving images, we also change the way the work is made and the way the work is watched.

So, when you're watching old movies, you have to take into consideration that this extra black space on your monitors, projectors or TVs is what you get because the movie is not the right format for today's screens and that it was not visible before. And this extra space is there because we have changed our screens, but we will change our screens again, and it's already happening.

I would not be surprised that, in fifteen years, we all flip our TVs at home backwards, because at one point the news anchor guys will figure out, okay, most people maybe watch our news at home on their little screens. So, maybe the news should be also vertical.

And then, if you try to watch a movie from beginning of the 2000s, you will have the small strip of screen, and all the movies would look ridiculous as old movies look funny on today's screens.

And bad quality, have you noticed that? It's also a different medium. Every time you have to make it new for the new medium that is reproducing the old media. Otherwise, it looks worse, it didn't look like that before.

L.V. – We were talking about the impassability of the edge, but sometimes this impassability can be forced. Purgar (2022: 11), again, talks about the erasure of the «boundaries of the “fourth wall”, the barrier that separates intra-image and extra-image reality». This erasure can also refer to the composition of the image itself, which extends beyond the edges of the frame. However, if the medium employed is video, the overflowing part must necessarily be rendered in another material. Video can therefore contribute to creating a multi-material work that seeks, in the representation, an illusory visual unity to offer to the spectator – in this way, perhaps, recreating that “fourth wall”, or at least that distance, which initially seemed denied. Well, it seems to me that I can apply these considerations to a video like *Triangle* (Fig. 4, <https://youtu.be/2fjOl5TOJ88>). But please, tell me more about what you wanted to achieve with it.

A.P. – I think you can see why it's called a triangle, of course. But what you don't know is that the triangle is moving. When you do photo documentation of a work, sometimes it's not really apparent what is visible

in the image. It's amazing how much talking artists need to use to explain what is apparent to your eyes. So, every time I have to explain art, or I listen to other people talk about art is a moment where I consider how important words are for understanding art.

So, in this context, you can't see it, but I'm standing under the black fabric and even though it is not visible at the first glance in the video, this is a video performance, to be more precise. I'm standing beneath a big canvas that is pitch black. I'm standing on one foot. And that's why it's possible to have a triangle out of the body, because my hands are stretched to one side of the triangle. My head is hidden, bent under my arms. One leg is the other side of the triangle, and I am standing on one foot. I was practicing for a year and a half to do this. You can see that the video is not long, one minute and thirty-one seconds in loop. In reality, I was doing it a couple of times for five minutes. This was the only usable part because it's very hard. And even to get into the pose was very difficult because I had to be covered properly with the fabric which had to be made again for every take. Before I did the stand, I needed to be enveloped in the fabric on its own because it's not possible to have this amount of fabric in the front and no fabric in the back because the fabric is too heavy, it would just slide off me. So, I needed to pin it on my feet and then hold it with my hands and also my free hand that is dangling was holding a little bit of the weight. And the fabric was falling half of the time. Sometimes my foot was visible. So, for the most part, I needed to repeat it and repeat it and repeat it. And at the end, I had usable one minute and a half of the whole process, but it was basically at least two hours of work after I have tried it a couple of more times before, for tests. So, setting it up was quite difficult.

What you don't see on this image is that this screen is furthered by a canvas, which is the actual canvas that was on the screen. This is where the differences start. Because I'm a moving, living, breathing person in a difficult situation, I always move in and out because I cannot stand still, it's too difficult. Even if I could stand really still, I would nonetheless move a little bit. Still image sometimes is in fact in place and sometimes it's not. Sometimes the triangle goes off and sometimes it's still here.

When we are dealing with frames, it's interesting how quickly it becomes a question of representation. In this case, you try to make something different, but it turns out like that.

It was interesting to me when I wanted to have the image of the fabric, which is the same here, this is the literal part of the fabric that I have cut and prepared for every version of a TV that was reproducing the video. The measurements are quite important here, so it had to continue into reality. And I was especially happy when all the windows of the gallery were open and a little bit of wind came from outside. So, the fabric would also sometimes move in the gallery. But I could not get the contrast and the color of the square over here from the same fabric to the reality part, because it was either too grey and not contrasting enough from the background, or it started to come off a little bit bluish, especially because of the TV and the reproduction factor, because when I was making it at home, perfect. You go out on the other screen, it's bluish and you cannot fix it.

L.V. – In this context, it seems to me, the question of the struggle or battle against the medium returns. In order to achieve visual unity, there must be no discernible gap between the fabric that envelops you in the video and the part that protrudes, as you say, continuing in reality – actual reality, once again. And, as I previously mentioned, the question of the right distance also emerges, a subject that has been thoroughly theorized, and in which the role of the frame is also significant. Simmel (2020: 148) already pointed out that the frame helps to place the work of art «at that distance from which alone it is aesthetically enjoyable». If you were to look at the work from too close up, the difference between the video and the protruding piece of fabric would be immediately apparent. Conversely, at the right distance – and, of course, with the correct light – the desired illusion is achieved, and you can appreciate the play of overflowing.

A. P. – The part where the play between distance, viewer and screen are clashing with the reality of an object is very much calculated because every viewer comes to the work at a distance and must come to the work. And I have watched the visitors because – I presumed right – they do come

closer because of the subtle differences between the screen and the object and that draws them in to have a closer, second look. So, in this case there is no optimal point to view the work because it works on the principle of small discoveries. First, the discovery of a human body beneath the fabric and then the clash of the image vs. reality reinforced by the subtle play of two moving edges of the triangle on the very edge of the screen.

L.V. – Thank you for this clarification. I had not previously considered this aspect, which dismantles (or, if you prefer, deconstructs) the question of right distance by highlighting the making-of the image through what you convincingly term "small discoveries".

Let us turn our attention back to the «difference between reality and its image transmission». When examining the theoretical issue of reproduction, the question of the impossibility of creating a 1:1 scale map often arises, a topic that has interested, as is well known, various authors, from Lewis Carroll to Jorge Luis Borges to Umberto Eco. The impracticability of a 1:1 scale map, or in any case of an image that faithfully replicates, in its entirety and in its dimension, the object of which the image in question is an image, leads us to realize that no representation system can completely account for itself in the act of representation. There is an inherent and unavoidable discrepancy between what represents and what is represented, which precludes complete coincidence. This also applies to photography, although already Peirce (1960: 159 – 2.281) asserted that it owes its classification as an index to the fact of being «physically forced to correspond point by point to nature». The image, when compared to actual reality, is the bearer of a different reality. If I am not mistaken, this is the theoretical underpinning of your installation entitled, precisely, *The Other Reality* (Figg. 5-6).

A.P. – This is a perfect example of a photograph or an image that is confronted with its own reality. For this exhibition, I have traveled to take photos of objects that are already present in all the galleries. So, sometimes artists deal with archives of museums and galleries of things that are to be thrown out, that don't matter anymore. And it's always the people that decide in that institution what is relevant and what is irrelevant. And

sometimes galleries cannot choose their own inventory. For example, this specific gallery, which is coincidentally called “The Edge Gallery” in Slavonski Brod in Croatia, they did not choose to have this huge piece of furniture that was quite old, antique. The owner of the space where the gallery was operating had only one condition and that was to keep this thing in the space. With the rest, you can do whatever you want. So, you have this big piece almost in the middle of the room because the gallery is quite small and divided into two small rooms, and it’s impossible to just ignore it. And I decided to appropriate it into my work.

The idea was to photograph the furniture frontally and then have the photo drape it and spill on the floor to see what happens when the image is trying to imitate reality. But when you try to imitate something, it does not work. And you can see that the floor is the same, but because of the quality of the image of it being a 2D thing, it’s impossible for it to imitate it really. And same concept was applied to other permanent things in galleries.

Pedestals are normal things to have in all galleries. Every gallery has at least one. The version of the pedestal is quite different from gallery to gallery. So, every time I go into a new gallery, I take a photo of their version. I’ve done it over and over and I will do it again. And also, different versions of it, because next year I have a couple of exhibitions that also expand on this, but it is not quite done, so I didn’t want to show it before it is installed into the space.

L.V. – Thank you for these clarifications. It might be interesting to learn more about the technical process. I think that the discrepancy between image and reality emerges at every stage of the photographic imaging process, from the initial framing to the final printing.

A.P. – The process of printing a photograph is totally different from what you would expect. When you are printing a photograph, you really have a different image. The first time my students print a photograph, they are usually very disappointed in their skill because you see an image on the screen and of course, it’s always more beautiful. The smaller the screen you have, the better the image. Why? You have more contrast. Also, the screens that you use for looking at images are lit up. Never forget that. So,

the photography you're consuming mostly in your life is an image that is illuminated from the inside. So, it's pure light and it's very different from the object of pigment, of real tactile form that is not lit up from inside. It's simply a different thing.

So, I was trying to make the exact color of the floor of the gallery. For these purposes, I did a really bad thing that I would not admit in Croatia, but I'm here in Italy, so what the hell? I took a small piece of the floor because I found some corner of the gallery floor that is falling apart, and I scratched it and took a little piece of it in order to have a reference point because no matter how many photographs I make, they're all non-important because you can never know the real color of the floor because of the light in the space, white balance, the automatic system, then interpretation on different screens and the interpretation of printing machines. It's nonsense. I needed the real version of the floor. So, I stole a little bit of the floor, took it with me and tried to work with my crew that I always work with, and they are really good guys that are resourceful problem solvers. We tried to make it as close as possible, and we did it according to the small fleck of the floor that we had. Then I arrived at the place and ... different lighting. Different pieces of the floor because the floor itself was not the same everywhere. It looks in the documentation photos completely different from the original color.

Here it looks like I've been dealing with a greyish floor. It wasn't. It looked differently live, but also it was not the same. It was more greyish at the end. So, I could not make it as close to reality as I wanted it to be.

L.V. – It appears that the correlation between image and reality is also evident in the work entitled *Bite Size* (Fig. 7). In this case, alongside some photographic images, there is also on display a fragment of the reality that was photographed. Precisely because this fragment has been decontextualized, it could perhaps be assimilated into an image and thus become a simulacrum of the very reality that it once was and now no longer fully is. Yet, if I am not mistaken, the effect is quite the opposite. It evokes the sensation of encountering a memorial fragment that continues to silently emanate an aura of its original provenance. In this manner, as an auratic witness that preserves the memory of its own past,

the real burst into the gallery space, that is, into the space dedicated to images, right in front of the images of that same real. And, in this intrusion, this fragment doesn't assimilate itself to images, but rather, by undermining the fiction on which the gallery space is based, establishes itself as a real presence, or rather, as a presence of the real. What are your thoughts on these considerations? What motivated you to create *Bite Size*?

A.P. – Basically, I got interested in a house that was fairly near to the Academy. I traveled almost every day to work, and, because I'm at the Academy for so very long, I was a student and then a part of teaching staff. So, for a long time, I was watching the same old house that was an automobile washing house, and then it stopped working when the economic crisis hit and it was completely abandoned. Then the roof started to collapse. Very soon after that it was necessary to demolish the whole house. But an interesting thing about countries that are not, for example, Germany, is that we do everything a little bit different. They did not demolish the whole house. They left, for whatever reason, an inside part of the house exposed, and the rest was just picked up. So, you could actually see the belly of a house that was formerly an auto wash, but before that, it was a place where people lived. Probably a family built it with their own hands. It was a very old house, and that's why it fell apart.

L.V. – This leads me to me to recall that, according to various architects – I am thinking primarily of Adolf Loos and his concept of *Raumplan* – the development of a house project must take place «from the inside out» (Loos 1962: 324), since living space is generated from the rooms that will be inhabited. A ruined building brings to light – figuratively, but first and foremost literally – the priority of the interior over the exterior. This may be a peripheral issue with respect to the intentions that led you to *Bite Size*, but your photographs also reveal this aspect.

A.P. – Yes, in these photographs you can see how it looked like inside with different parts of the house. There is visible the bathroom, and this part with the window. It was quite big and quite long. And it was interesting to me to see how it would reflect in photography in a manner

that you can see what is happening inside. But it was basically impossible. I was thinking, maybe if I include all the things around. So, it looks really off, this huge wall of personal histories that are visibly inscribed into these walls, so you have a sort of a voyeuristic view into a gut of the house. But, to really consider it a strange view, you need all the other context, right? You need the rest of the city, you need people walking by, you need the meadow that is growing in place of former walls... So, I was thinking, no, it's impossible. I cannot include all the city in an image. So, maybe the better thing to do was to bring the part of the house into the gallery. So, in front, here, you can see the bricks that were falling apart over here and the real pieces from the wall.

My initial idea was, I would go into the night and steal a couple of ceramic pieces and pick up a couple of bricks. Let us remember, I had been watching this house for twenty years and I thought, okay, great. And then one day, I was going on a trip to a train station. Luckily, I needed to pick up something from the Academy because I forgot something. And, luckily, I had time and I was passing by and I saw that they tore up the last part of the house. So, I had to abandon the trip to the Academy and quickly organize the whole transport, because the few bricks and tiles that are neatly stacked for the exhibition don't look as big, but they are heavy. And I had to buy lots of heavy-duty plastic bags to transport it. So, I was there at the last moment.

So, in the end, this place actually does not exist anymore. You can see here the pieces I have kept, the dust, everything is originally as it supposed to be.

L.V. – Let us proceed to another of your works, *Star Sky* (Fig. 8). Here it seems to me that you wanted to test yourself with metaphor. Is the sky that appears here metaphorical? Or? How does the relationship between photography and photographed reality manifest itself here?

A.P. – Of course, you can see that something is off with the sky. The lines are a little bit off, right? And you can also see a little bit of color peeking through here. So, something is wrong.

This is the idea that I had as a student. I thought maybe because photography uses an iris, a little hole, and a precursor to photography was

this big room as a spectacle. If you had a small precise pinhole and right light coming from outside, you could have a *camera obscura*, which on Italian makes a lot of sense because it's a Latin word. On Croatian, we don't connect that that *camera obscura* means a dark room. We only think "*camera obscura*", okay, a precursor to photography. You have a pinhole and then you can have basically a big projection from outside. That is what the camera is. Basically, holes in the dark, nothing else. We just added a lot of technology so that we can have from it a real object at the end. That's the progression of technology, nothing else.

L.V. – So, in this case, the starting point was nothing less than a reflection on one of the precursors of photography.

A.P. – I thought, let's go back to photography and its roots and let's take a photo of holes, only holes that are supposed to look like the original photography, what photography is. And I was searching for a place where I could make it or where the holes would already exist. And I couldn't find it for probably fifteen years or so.

A couple of years ago, I was doing a project with students. We have a big factory, a big former metalwork factory right across from the Academy, and we were trying to shoot some interesting shots, nothing restricting in the subject, just to practice. And ruins are always so expressive to practice composition. And it's a huge, huge complex and not open for the public to just come in.

We had a deal with the owner, because it can be quite dangerous in some parts. One day I entered this small warehouse that is hidden a little bit, on the edge of the complex. It had big metal doors that were completely ruined by holes from the war. This was probably made from bullets, shards, shrapnel... Probably around 1991 or 1992, something like that. It caused damage.

Of course, this was not a place that was usually used, so nobody needed to renovate it, therefore it stayed like that all this time. When you come closer to the photo, you can see the slits for the doors because the metal does not completely cover everything in a millimeter. There are shadows from the cracks on the floor. The bright line is light from outside because the doors should be open completely for trucks that are complete

with a small door fitted for one person. So, you can see the daylight from behind, the cobweb spiders made in the holes, the trees that have grown in into the whole courtyard that used to be industrial, but now it's a forest, almost. And the holes that dominate the whole scene are from shrapnel, of course. Some parts of the scene could be confusing because some of the holes that remind us of stars are not holes but light passing through the shrapnel holes on the floor. So, it flips your image, it flips your expectations of what you need to see, what is an image.

So, when you enter the room and look at the image, you expect something like a star sky, but when you come closer, then you expose all these little details that you didn't even know existed.

L.V. – I recall that, during one of your lectures in Cagliari, a student posed a question that you yourself found particularly interesting. In essence, the student asked whether, in the process of making an image, you encounter any resistance, perhaps due to preconceptions about how that image should look. I think this question aligns coherently with *The Other Reality*, particularly in light of what you told me about colors and lightning. But, in general, it is consistent with every work you have intended to discuss in our conversation. Works of art always defy our expectations, do they not?

A.P. – Exactly, I want to have a practical answer to that question. When I was making the video *Cutting* in the field of sugar, I thought it would look a little bit different. I thought that I could make the ball be in a fairly similar place, and when I make a cut, it will not be as visible. And I thought, okay, I could probably fake it in some kind of way. And then I saw that it was resisting me. It was not possible.

Every time you have a process, even if you're writing something, it's the same process, you have a preconception of how it should look like and what it should be. In art, it's very visible, so it's easier to speak in that term. So, you think, okay, I will do this and that, and at the end, this will be the conclusion. But then you start your research, you do the thing, and you put it all into one basket, and then you start writing or you start producing, whatever, and you see that the end result will be different because you didn't know a lot of things. *Art often deals with something that was not made*

before. That is the definition of art. You must do it a little bit differently than before. For example, students that study art want to produce something, but they don't have enough experience to see ahead, so the end result is most often different from the initial idea. The less experience you have, the more resistance you can see. Of course, the image will be different from your starting point, but that's not necessarily a bad thing. Images do resist us and our preconceptions of it.

Imagine if we lived in a world where you can know everything in advance. I think I would jump out of the window if that was the reality. Because if I know everything in advance, nothing can surprise me. I don't want to live forever. I want life to be exciting and new, and I want experiences to surprise me.

And, in that way, the image acts as a real person. You can talk about it as if personification of a person, it doesn't resist us all the time. And our preconceptions must be lost in the middle of production, because my idea, maybe, does not correlate with the process. So, in the specific case of the video *Cutting*, I had to abandon my faking of the cut. I had to either throw it in the trash or decide that the cut is actually there for a good reason. Also, I had to throw away a lot of recordings in order to make it good. So yes, I would say images resist us all the time, especially for those who work in production of images. We can see that all the time.

My advice for my students, that I think is applicable in different disciplines, is that you don't resist it. And if you work against it, it will eat you alive at the end. So, work with it, not against it. It's not your enemy. It should be your friend. It's sort of like a psychological trick: if you have a big monster in the room, try to offer it tea. Don't fight it, don't pull out your gun first. Try to offer it tea and then see how it goes.

L.V. – Ana, I would express my gratitude for taking the time to do this conversation. I cannot think of a better conclusion than the following: rather than shooting the monster, let us offer it a cup of tea.



Fig. 1. Ana Petrović, *On Edge*, 93 x 120 cm, inkjet print, series of 4, 2018



Fig. 2. Ana Petrović, *A Place that does not Exist*, inkjet print on foil laminated on galvanized sheet metal, 100 x 50, 60 x 30, 40 x 20 cm, 2021



Fig. 3. Ana Petrović, *Cutting*, 02'10" in loop, HD, sound, 2021



Fig. 4. Ana Petrović, *Triangle*, HD video, cotton fabric, 131 min in loop, 2021



Fig. 5. Ana Petrović, *The Other Reality*, inkjet print on paper, found object, dimensions variable, 2021



Fig. 6. Ana Petrović, *The Other Reality*, inkjet print on paper, found object, dimensions variable, 2021

Ana Petrović, Luca Vargiu, *Images always on the edge*



Fig. 7. Ana Petrović, *Bite Size*, inkjet print on foil laminated on forex, 120 x 80 cm, bricks, ceramic tiles, 2021



Fig. 8. Ana Petrović, *Star Sky*, inkjet print on foil laminated on forex, 92 x 140 cm, 2021

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