

**Alenka Pirman: *The Ninth Coromandel****Exhibition, public tour, presentation, discussion***Exhibition:** 28 October–9 December 2009**Public tour:** 3 December 2009 at 17.00 (with Petra Kapš)**Presentation:** 8 December 2009 at 18.30 (first public presentation of the publication *The Ultimate Word*)**Discussion:** 8 December 2009 at 19.00 (a panel discussion with experts on the work of Alenka Pirman)-----  
Artworks:*The Ultimate Word*, 2007–2009 (bound drawings, chairs; printed matter to be published in December)*Ideal*, 2001– (golden toothpicks)*Shut Your Eyes and Watch*, 2006 (Microsoft PowerPoint)*Untitled*, 2008 (Idrija lace)*Untitled*, 2007 (hair-dryer, table tennis ball, drawing on wall)*Untitled*, 2005 (matches with coins)  
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In 2009, **Studio 6** invited curators **Petra Kapš** and **Božidar Zrinski**, who sought out to find non-commissioned works of art, ideas, concepts and projects. Artist **Alenka Pirman** responded to the invitation by submitting works which meet the curators' criteria.

**Alenka Pirman** graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in 1989. Between 1991 and 1992 she was the editor-in-chief of the magazines *Likovne besede / Artwords* and *M'zin*, then the artistic director of the Škuc Gallery (1990–96), the assistant director of the Soros Centre for Contemporary Arts Ljubljana (1997–99), the vice-president of the Management Board of the International Contemporary Art Network (ICAN, 1998–99) and the co-founder and mentor of the *Svet umetnosti / World of Art* educational programme for contemporary art curators (1996–98). She was the editor and the head of the *Artservis*, on-line media between 2001 and 2004, and a taxi driver in 2003, 2007 and 2008.

In the 1990s, her work was predominantly related to three fictitious institutions: the *SK8 Museum* (1991–93), the *RIGUSRS – Research Institute for Geo Art Statistics of the Republic of Slovenia* (1997, with Vuk Ćosić and Irena Woelle), and the *Domestic Research Institute* (1994–98). She then collaborated with several artistic collectives/platforms, including Luther Blissett/01.org (1998) and Bughouse (2002–03). She has carried out several methodological exhibition projects, including working on a German loanword collection (*Arcticae horulae*, 1991–98) and on a deposited collection of the Police Museum (*The Case. Art and Criminality*, 2005, with Biserka Debeljak). She is a founding member of the Domestic Research Society (2004), where she develops collaborative exhibition and web projects (*The Cabinet*, 2005–; *Unleashed Tongue*, 2004–; *Indija.si*, 2007–). The artwork *Ideal* (2001–) was presented at the exhibitions *Men*, Celje Gallery of Contemporary Art (2001), *Clementine Deliss*, *Rirkrit Tiravanija*, *Alenka Pirman*, Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris (2002) and *Territories, Identities, Nets: Slovene Art 1995–2005*, Museum of Modern Art Ljubljana (2005), while *Shut Your Eyes and Watch* (2006) was exhibited in the *Cabinet* of the Domestic Research Society and Kibela Gallery (2006) and *Untitled* (2007) was featured in the *Cultural Hero*, 2nd Biennial of the Quadrilateral in the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Rijeka (2007). Works *Untitled* (2008), *Untitled* (2005) and *The Ultimate Word* have not been exhibited yet.

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The work *The Ultimate Word* was produced by the Domestic Research Society with the financial support of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Slovenia and the City of Ljubljana. The lace for the work *Untitled* (2008) was made by Ivica Pirman. The discussion was developed and produced in collaboration with Studio6 in 'O' – reflections on art /2009. Public tour was prepared and produced in collaboration with Studio 6 and 'O' – reflections on art – the Lady with the Unicorn and the Lion. Studio 6 programme is supported by Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Slovenia and Municipality of Ljubljana. Curatorial work of Petra Kapš is supported by the City of Maribor.

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The exhibition *The Ninth Coromandel* was inspired by the contact between two utopian places, the encounter of *The Ninth Land (Deveta dežela; 1878)* written by Josip Stritar and *The India Coromandel (Indija Komandija; 1884)* by Anton Mahnič, which was further developed by other visions of different, good and evil, positive and negative fictitious places and descriptions. *The Ninth Coromandel* of Alenka Pirman is "Where the artists are anonymous / where there is no notion of *curricula vitae* / where no-one seeks authorities for protection / where there is no need for the myth production / where airports and streets have no names / where no-one digs through the hard disks of the deceased / where no awards or prizes are bestowed / let alone named. (Alenka Pirman, *The Ninth Coromandel*, in: *Slovenes Upraised by Slovenes*, theatre programme of SNG Drama Ljubljana, Vol. LXXXVII, No. 15, season 2007/08, pp. 16–17).

The exhibition includes works created in the last nine years. The number nine is of key significance in folk imaginary, while in the current one it even transcends the symbolic framework of the presentation. From Alenka Pirman's viewpoint, the *Coromandel* is expressed with the word 'no', with a negative argumentation addressing the here and now of 'Slovenian' art. In *The Ninth Coromandel*, the utopia is realised, the final word is (be)gotten, the oracle for domestic use functions flawlessly and the tiny wooden stick finally turns golden.

It attains artistic refinement through a playful intertwining of a critique of nationality via the symbols of national culture and tradition, and the analysis of the current political farce filling journalistic language. The artist has pushed the resistance and critique of the media present to the limit, the edge – to the last, ultimate word to replace all others. The replacement will stem the violence of words. The mixture of intellectual and practical humour is telling.

The common thread of *The Ninth Coromandel* is autobiography, which is presented in a concrete and symbolic way. The works manifest the artist's life – sheer survival and life in the existential and artistic sense. This is literally closely connected to her everyday life and living environment, as she created the works in the intimate concrete surroundings of her own home (the artist does not have a studio), where everydayness is revealed in individually specific 'bodily' forms. The artworks presented in the exhibition *The Ninth Coromandel* are thus silent witnesses of the active artistic approach.

DIY procedures are chosen as the 'modus operandi' when this is an essential part of an individual work of art. The availability of existing things in an ordinary flat is key. Execution procedures are long-lasting, requiring passion about the work, a great deal of perseverance and precision. Often the procedure is marked by monotonous repetition of the movement of hand, and mental and physical focus. The repetition of movement puts the artist close to practices with which individuals "empty their mental space" and fulfil existing given time, just like prisoners do with different kinds of manual activities, including making objects with matches, toothpicks and other readily available material.

Even though the artistic work is repetitive and monotonous, the incorporation of these procedures places it in the elusive position between (self-)therapeutic nature of the mentioned methods and the necessity of the artistic principle, which is not a conniving scheme enabling easier access. It is a critique of the existing situation, stereotypes and questions about how to survive the periods of despair and hardship confronting individuals in their individuality in the existing system of social reality, which it manages to creatively transcend. For three years, the artist persistently counted words in the main article of a Slovenian daily, cut out and burned them into her own furniture, made beds for coins from matches etc. She enabled the spectator (user) to tackle the material through the 'emptying' method. By persistently watching the emptiness of changing empty slides (using Microsoft PowerPoint) the viewer can (re-)live the described procedure.

The objects do not hide their everyday appearance: a chair, a hairdryer, lace, toothpicks actually insist on what they are, their function remains unchanged. They are handy and intended for everyday use. But, as is characteristic of Alenka Pirman's artworks, they are not what they might seem at first sight. They encourage and stir imagination, they are the outcome of long intellectual and physical processes. The final product – the artwork that enters a public dialogue is created to the measure of man.

The relations between the concreteness of the artworks and their fields of meaning playfully extending from the humorous layers to the critical ones are another common characteristic. The exhibition emphasises this precisely because of the condensation of works and their placement in the existing state of the Project Room. The exhibition of artworks is therefore transformed into their research; it is a platform of different experiences and readings. The opposition between the solemnity of the conceived problems and the objects of research, realised either by herself or to order, and the simplicity of the DIY method is also important.

The exhibition is the result of artistic work interested in the borderline, where an artistic intervention makes seemingly everyday things act as engines of different visions, readings and uses. By revealing her artistic procedures, the underlying motives and the final product the artist establishes an active stance toward the media reality, relevant forms of persuasion and communication of content, the art system and the identifying layers of nationality. She offers models enabling critical examination of society with simple, yet carefully conceived methods and tools, which activates us as self-critical inhabitants of our local environment.

**Petra Kapš**