Grey Field

*The sense of sight discerns the difference of shapes, wherever they are (...) without delay or interruption, employing careful calculations with almost incredible speed (...) When the sense cannot discern and place the object through its own mode of action, it recognises it through the manifestation of other differences, sometimes perceiving truly and sometimes imagining incorrectly (...)*

Ptolemy, *Optics*

Saša Živković (1970) creates *an enchanted circle* through the dialectics of creation, permanent space-time change of the continuum of optical illusion based on grey and white polarities. The circle is an expanded dot and the sphere, which is how Plato saw the human soul, is an expanded circle. This is analogous to the circularity of the cosmos in which nothing stands still, everything moves. Just like the relationship between negative and positive image, where one is reflected in the other, with the final materialization between the matrix built from sand and a contrasting background Saša spreads achromatic grey in dual tones which acts both as the link and the dividing line – the third part of the essence of the black and white illusion that reduces the entire world to the binary code of zeros and ones.[[1]](#footnote-1) They are transformed into shadings between the *ornament* and the background and their complex overlaps.[[2]](#footnote-2) Here we specifically refer to elementary, yet contrasting opposites of grey light and shadow by which the artist achieves an ambiguous spatial image of a circular mandala.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Živković reifies the abstract, spiritual experience with optical ambiguities, symbolic and sign reflections, as well as with the sublimation of the economic term *Greyfield,* which he transforms into a mark, sign, label, a reverse brand, an upside-down mirror reflection of grey fields, horizontal emblems - if we agree that the vertical signifies spiritual growth – also of the grey areas devoid of people, activity and spirit of vitiated urban spaces, empty buildings and deserted localities, symbolic marks of the all-pervading, soon possible collective entropy due to imbalance, distortion and destruction arising from the power play of the large minority of people in power who extinguish the past and obliterate, on the basis of unity of diversity the projected future with the substrate of universality of global totalitarianism.[[4]](#footnote-4)

However, following the theory of citationality the artist builds on and refers to Juraj Dobrović's anthological graphic print *Polje/Field* (1965), one of the classics of geometry of Croatian Modernism, based on optical ambiguities of abstracted illusion created using a complex circular and triangular raster of expressed psychological tensions on the axis visual field - observer.[[5]](#footnote-5)

The observer's eye, saturated with visuality, plunges into a black circle, the starting point of everything, which at the same time radially emerges in all equal directions to the widest rim, inscribed into a black square. Dynamic depth is simultaneously flat and vice versa. All this creates an ambiguous, constantly moving visual composition that expects an imperfect input from the observer who impacts the seen on *subatomic level*. Mental focus of the creator that requires an equal hypnotic fascination of the observer is also the point of the illusion based on deception created due to persistence of vision, actually on streams of light on retina in innumerable combinations and relationships with complex processing in *cortical* cells sensitive to the orientation and the *rabbit-duck* illusion *processed* in the cerebral cortex.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Although Živković's is most closely related to Juraj Dobrović, both integralities stem from the dual ancient lighting and shading, and one of the most famous circular archetypes – besides the symbolism of mandala – is Fraser's *false spiral* (1908), *twisted cord illusion* – a visual distortion that looks like a spiral, but is actually made of a series of concentric circles that from a different angle, a bit shifted from the direction of motion, create the effect of a *spiral illusion*.[[7]](#footnote-7) This points to the psychology of seeing and brain processing of visual stimuli. However, art also possesses the indescribable excess of purposefulness that gives a certain purpose to our imperfect senses.

Živković's mandala is a sign that points to something other than what we can see, to a *grey field*, grey hole in the global universality of the world in which everyone is seemingly equal. This is the sign of false mimicry of appearance, membrane, matrix of manifestation, which always hides an unfair distribution of capital by which a few *super-rich* people own more than the majority of the rest of mankind. This is not true. This is actually an illusion, because we are all rich, young and beautiful even when we are not. We are a part, whether we like it or not, of an insane *terror of aesthetics and profit*. It seems that there is no solution for such an unjust *state of affairs* of the endangered world pervaded by appearance and constant *growth of everything*.

A different vision of Živković's mandala is purely symbolic.

Saša points to the indescribable and never fully captured meaning of the symbol; to the process of individuation of an individual who, by striving towards balance between emotion, sensory, intuition and thoughtfulness in this meaningless world, tries to become aware of his/her own unconscious and achieve psychological integrity. This is a complex and multi-faceted symbolism of the mandala that surpasses the scope of this interpretation, bringing us to the topic of meaning, psyche and visual arts.[[8]](#footnote-8) Saša's spatial image is multiperspective. Therein lies its never fully exhausted power. It is a reflection of an inner reality. This is the point of the trefoil illusion. We have to believe in it or the optical magic seen from *God's perspective* disappears.

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1. "(…) suffice it to show that a simple but serviceable image can be translated into equal units which are either filled or empty. Any large street sign composed of electric bulbs will demonstrate this principle – a notation of which are to be 'off' or 'on' will create the required configuration of light. The telegraphed picture and indeed the television screen, produced as they are by the varying intensities of one beam scanning the field, illustrate the principle involved. (…) There are many media of art in which such an 'on' or 'off' principle is applied – let us think of certain types of drawn work or lace in which the netting is filled in or left empty of pattern but still gives perfect images (…). It does not matter in such a medium whether the filled-in squares represent 'figure' or 'ground'. All that counts is the relationship between the two signals. Maybe it was some textile technique in which reversal of relationships was frequent and automatic that first brought home to craftsmen the fact that the negative image is as easy to decode as the positive. It is well known that the Greek vase painters made use of this principle of reversal when they switched over from the earlier black-figured technique to the red-figured style in which the tone of burnt clay is reserved for the figure. (...) what is needed to set off the intended shape against the nonintended ground is the relationship of contrast, of 'yes' or 'no', regardless of the direction of the change.“ E. H. Gombrich, *Umjetnost i iluzija* [*Art and Illusion*], Nolit - Beograd, 1984, pp. 48 – 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. New *Siva mandala / Grey Mandala* (2019) by Saša Živković was created by adding all the colours from the previous coloured mandala. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Mandala literally means a circle, in fact, a complex visual construct that symbolizes the cosmic and meditative relationship between man and everything else. For more, see: Jean Chevalier - Alan Gheerbrant, *Rječnik simbola* [*The Dictionary of Symbols*]..., KIC - Naklada Jesenski Turk, Zagreb, 2007, pp. 414 – 416. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. “When authority does not take the name of the party but that of capital, the “transavantgardist” solution (postmodernist in Jencks’ sense) turns out to be more appropriate than the anti-modern one. Eclecticism is the degree zero of contemporary general culture: you listen to reggae, you watch a western, you eat McDonald’s at midday and local cuisine at night, you wear Paris perfume in Tokyo and dress retro 5 in Hong Kong, knowledge is the stuff of TV game shows. It is easy to find a public for eclectic works. When art makes itself kitsch, it panders to the disorder which reigns in the “taste” of the patron. Together, artist, gallery owner, critic and public indulge one another in the Anything Goes – it’s time to relax. But this realism of Anything Goes is the realism of money: in the absence of aesthetic criteria it is still possible and useful to measure the value of works of art by the profits they realise. This realism accommodates every tendency just as capitalism accommodates every “need” – so long as these tendencies and needs have buying power.“ Jean-François Lyotard, *Postmoderna protumačena djeci [The Postmodern Explained to Children]*, August Cesarec, Naprijed, Zagreb, 1990, pp. 18 – 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. In her book *Teorija citatnosti [Theory of Citationality]* Dubravka Oraić Tolić claims that the period of postmodernity and postmodernism is dominated by illustrative citationality, i.e. museum and archival citationality, that strengthens the cultural canon. Postmodern artists “are being put in a subordinate position, they literally copy and replicate the texts of their own tradition and contemporary culture to show that tradition and culture do exist, that they should not be forgotten, but must be preserved from destruction by all means, including simple unedited citations”, Anica Bilić, *Zašto su mali pisci prešućivani u hrvatskoj književnoj historiografiji [Why Were the Minor Croatian Writers Passed Over in Silence in the Croatian Literary Historiography]*, PDF, Hrčak, Portal of Scientific Journals of Croatia – Hvar City Theatre Days, Vol. 33, No. 1, May 2007, p. 436. This symptomatic claim is also, of course, applicable to postmodern visual art. For a more detailed analysis of Doborović's graphic oeuvre see the study: Ana Petković Basletić, *Mogućnost kvadrata* *[Possibility of Square]* in*: Juraj Dobrović / izbor iz donacije [Juraj Dobrović / A Selection from Donation]*, Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Department of Prints and Drawings, Zagreb, pp. 5. – 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The following also shows how we experience illusion: “All objects, be it two or three-dimensional, are first accessible to the human perception as *images*: as visible or tangible images. Simply put: as flat stimuli of the most varied types which also include the sense of hearing, taste and smell.“ An inspirational definition of sensory *perception of images* by Karl Clausberg who further mentions Ewald Hering's (1834 – 1918) statement from 1862: “The one who truly wants to understand the essence of seeing has to fully break free from traditional ideas about the so-called projection or representation of images that are created on the retina: there is nothing there projected outward. At all times all the impacts on the senses need to be put into a proper spatial relationship. For human consciousness the entire body is just a part of the outer world. Precisely because it is the part that is always at our disposal, we are used to observe everything else around us in relation to the body. And our body is also the image we reproduce from memory and place into the existing space, if we do not just look at its individual parts (hand, foot, etc.). A spatial comparison is created between the image we have of the body and the image we have of other objects.“ Karl Clausberg, *Neuroznanost o slici [Neuroscience on Image]*, in: *Uvod u povijest umjetnosti [An Introduction to Art History]* (edited by: Hans Belting, Henirich Dillly…), Fraktura, 2007, pp. 300 – 301. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. James Fraser (1863 - 1936) is a British psychologist who described *spiral illusion* in 1908. See the visual example, known as *Fraser's spiral*, in: same as in note 1, p. 196. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. For the basic Jung's symbolic terms of archetypes: *collective unconscious*, *animus, anima*, *the Self*, *synchronicity*, *individuation*, *afterimage* see: C. G. Jung, *Čovjek i njegovi simboli* [*Man and His Symbols*] (...), Mladost, Zagreb, 1987; C. G. Jung*, Sjećanja, snovi, razmišljanja (autobiografija)* [*Memories, Dreams, Reflections (Autobiography)*], Fabula Nova, Zagreb, 2004; C. G. Jung and W. Pauli, *Tumačenje prirode i psihe* [*The Interpretation of Nature and the Psyche*], Prosvjeta, Zagreb, 1989; C. G. Jung, *Psihologija & alkemija* [*Psychology and Alchemy*], Naprijed, Zagreb, 1984. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)