

## **How to build a universe that does not fall apart two days later**

How many of us know today who furnishes the electricity whenever we turn on the light? Or who assembled the engine of the car we drive every morning and the TV monitor we watch every night? However vital, within the technological wintriness in which we live, there are no longer any faces behind these tasks. Workers have become faceless, silent 'new men' yet with an old knowledge, behaving like flashing contact points between the life zone and the abstract expert systems that rule the world.

In Serban Savu's work, they appear the same - indefinite access points to a symbolic layer of existence that has been forever propping up the materiality and the transience of the real. The realm the artist explores, nevertheless, has a clear-cut identity: that of the Romanian contemporary society, where the collapse of the communist utopia paved the way for capitalism to emerge. Recent economic development has transformed the grey and oppressive urban landscape into a spectacular mixture of sharp and absurd contrasts: existing and new architectures are mushrooming into postmodern structures, primitive carts and classy cars are running on the same highway, luxurious casinos are looming behind ridiculous kiosks. The new grammar of urban life shifts conceptions of space and time, human relationships, communication, representation and authenticity, revealing a feverish searching for meaning within a space of different social and aesthetic experiences.

However, Savu's paintings do not illustrate the chaos, intensity and dirtiness; his perspective is neither heroic nor critical, but rather calm and precise. It is as if he wishes to suspend the flux on the very thin line between the old and the new, the predictable and the accidental, in order to bring it to the point of contemplation and to investigate it better. The workers build effortlessly; their clothes are spotless; the fixed joining between the glass boards and steel rods is accurate; the surfaces are crystal and the finishing is perfect, as if drawn by Mondriaan.

The dominant colours, with faded grey, green and blue tones, are also reminiscent of a neo-plastic pure aesthetic. Nothing spoils the photographic clarity and stillness of the image, even if an infinite and confined ideological tension lies behind it. The fetish of the knowledgeable expert has replaced the compromised myth of the socialist worker, as organically as neo-liberalism has replaced the totalitarian nightmare. But the anxiety remains the same, since the new men and cities have no call for another definite aim, but only a respite from an engine that will not stop. Concerned with the positioning of new ideologies within Romanian social reality, Serban Savu uses painting as the means by which to question how positions of identity and authority are constructed or deconstructed, how things take shape in relation to each other within a web of interrupted narratives and the fluid experiences that have redefined the world.

### **Simona Nastac**

Simona Nastac is a freelance curator and writer who lives and works in London and Bucharest.