

On mourning and remembering grandparents through reenactment

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After his grandmother Marija Emeršič died in 2011, Goran Turnšek, a professional dancer who switched to photography, was inspired to start working on a series of self-portraits in which he impersonates his grandparents Marija and her late husband Jakob Emeršič, who died in a hunting accident in 1993. Marija died from brain hemorrhage after she hit her head in a retirement home and was sent to the hospital too late.

Through playful performance Turnšek explores the various influences he had undergone from his grandparents as well as mourning the loss of his grandparents in an artistic manner. These two series, now coming together for the first time as a single project, question the traditional gender roles that are typical of village life and notions of repressed memories, on personal and collective levels. Photography is said to be a perfect medium for *memento mori*, but what do we really remember about, for example, our grandparents? How reliable is our memory after all? Could the act of dressing in your grandparents' garments and reenacting their gestures revive one's memories, or even conjure up repressed memories?

For a while, Turnšek moved into his grandparents' former home in Zabovci in Eastern Slovenia, where through photographic choreographies he tried capture both the place and the memories it evoked, not just images, but also the smells of the place, how things feel like, such as fabrics, furniture or the floor. Turnšek had played a lot in this environment as a child—which left traces not only on his retina but in the fabric of his bodily experience as well.

He first set out to play his grandfather Jakob. Turnšek was close to his grandfather as a boy, who had quite an influence on him at the time of his sudden death. After his passing, Turnšek was determined to escape into dance and art. Dance was already part of his life as he did ballroom dancing and his granddad was a tailor who made costumes like the tailcoats he needed for dancing. There's a scene played on the balcony, where Turnšek almost fell off as a baby and was saved by Jakob, but since he was too young to remember it, he only knows the scene through stories. He tried to imagine and re-

enact how Jakob must have used his body to save him from falling down.

In the images we see Turnšek dressed in one of his grandfather's old suits, doing everyday tasks in movements by the Jakob he remembers, such as cleaning, gardening, decorating or getting ready for a hunt. Turnšek found the suit he wears hanging in Jakob's wardrobe. Slightly too big and somewhat wrinkled, it hints at the impossibility of fully representing another. While memories are morphing through time, it becomes ever more impossible to get back in the skin of one's ancestors. But for Turnšek these performances before his own camera have become ways of examining identity, on the levels of gender, family relationships and nationality (having been born, like his parents and grandparents, in Yugoslavia, which exists no longer).

The Marija images were made several years after the Jakob series. There is a change in style (of performance and photography) springing forth from what Turnšek remembers from his grandparents in tandem with discovering things about them through exploring what they left behind in their house, such as Yugoslavian crystal, furniture, vases and traditional lacework. This home was a time capsule preserving a sense of former Yugoslavia, the memory of which got repressed after Slovenia's independence. Marija, who was responsible for the house decoration, turned out to not only have been the hardworking housewife, but a more delicate and tidy person, based on the dresses Turnšek found and the way they were stored.

Transforming into his grandmother's character, Turnšek employed elements from masks used in the Orači carnival, where men dress like old women. In doing so he is able to also explore his own femininity. Contrary to the staged choreographies he captured with a self-timer when enacting his grandfather, he wanted to picture his grandmother in a more modern way, as if she would be playfully taking selfies for her social media profiles.