

T O T A H

Aleksandar Duravcevic

EMPIRE

October 29th – December 18th, 2020

TOTAH presents *EMPIRE*, an exhibition of work by Aleksandar Duravcevic, on view from October 29th through December 18th, 2020. This is the artist's third solo exhibition with the gallery.

Aleksandar Duravcevic's vision of *EMPIRE* restricts itself to a single image: the head of an eagle. While being the national bird of the United States, eagles also carry a host of associations in their own right. They signify inspiration, release from bondage, victory, longevity, speed; as such, the eagle is a fitting emblem for a nation as powerful as the United States. Working across 50 different drawings, created over the course of four years (2013-2017), Duravcevic dismantles 'empire' of both its archaic and contemporary meaning. On the one hand, empire implies expansiveness and majesty; on another, the glory of empire has long ago perished into history, and any nation that resembles one is bound to do the same.

The inevitability of an empire's decline gives Duravcevic's eagles a storied poignance. In terms of the realism with which the eagles are rendered, a kind of cautionary tale seems to be described. Like stages of a nation's decline, the movement from one picture to another underscores sameness within variety. Each eagle has its own distinct character, its personalized appearance. But this variety occurs only within very strict and regimented boundaries. The eye Duravcevic foregrounds in each picture occupies the same position across all 50 eagles. Through measured repetition, the presence of a panoptic, invariant eye connotes internment as much as freedom.

EMPIRE takes hold of the viewer by its unassuming neutrality. Creating an air of familiarity across different images, one can unpack Duravcevic's series in divergent ways. *EMPIRE* is equally obsessive and comical, tactile and aloof, literal and symbolic. Anything the series accomplishes, it also undermines. Foregrounding the emergence of light from darkness, Duravcevic's continual application of graphite halos the incised presence of each eagle. Repetition becomes nuanced individualism; fidelity to nature is staggered across 50 similar drawings. Just as American ideals of freedom affect citizens and travelers throughout the world, Duravcevic's drawings subsume the viewer into a paranoid bird's-eye view. Collapsing the distinction between sentience and repetition, consciousness and spectacle, *EMPIRE* annuls the very notion of cultural boundaries and differences.

Aleksandar Duravcevic (born in Montenegro, 1970) studied in Cetinje and Florence, Italy, and holds an MFA from the Pratt Institute, New York. His body of work includes sculptures, drawings, photography, and paintings. Through them he explores identity and duality – across cultures, within history, and between life and death. Duravcevic received a New York Foundation for the Arts grant in 2005, and his work has been included in exhibitions at The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia, and MoMA PS1, New York. His work is part of the permanent collections at The Uffizi in Florence, The Brooklyn Museum, and The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. A native of Montenegro and its representative at the 56th Venice Biennale in 2015, he was included again as part of the 58th Venice Biennale in 2019 with the exhibition *Artists Need to Create on the Same Scale that Society Has the Capacity to Destroy: Mare Nostru*. Duravcevic lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.

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