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..... 149

LJUBA POPOVIĆ

(1934—2016)



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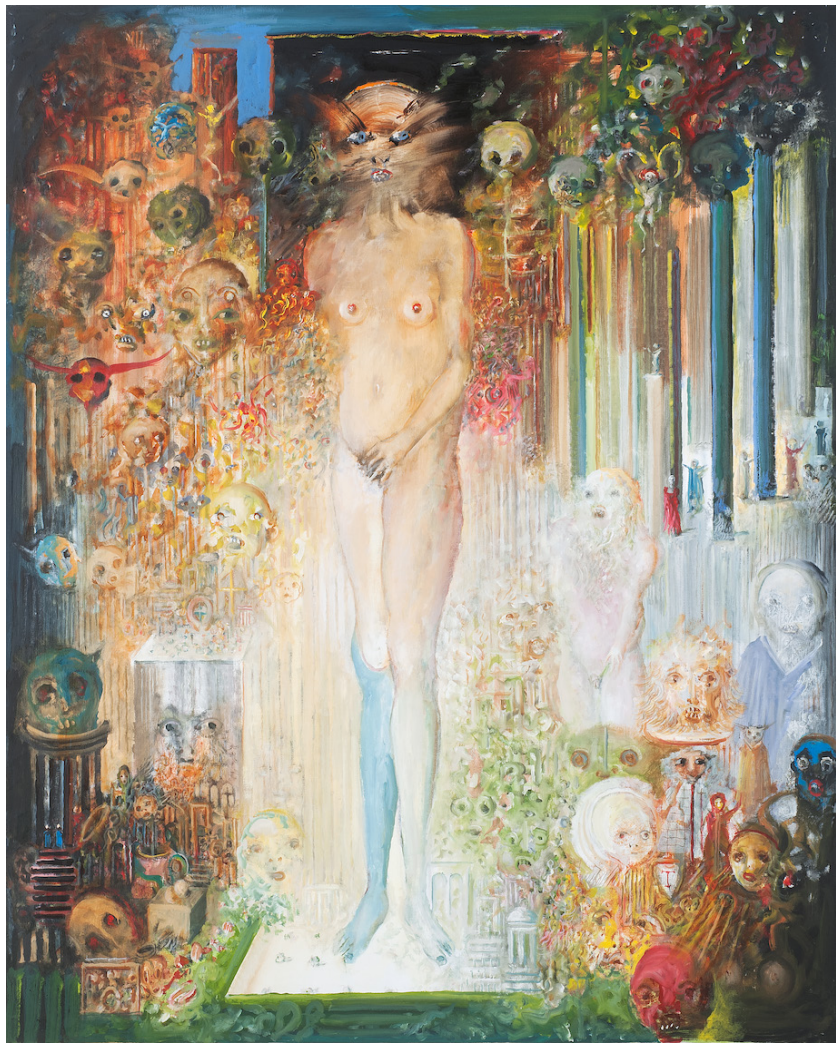
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Sleepwalking cat, 2015—2016
Oil on canvas, 162 × 130 cm





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FOREWORD

Exposed to everyday entropy, stunned by the speed at which sand is leaking between our fingers, overpowered by the knowledge that it is impossible to grasp anything in our life completely, in a way that would make us feel safe, we seek to resort to sorting, classifying, defining the drawers the content and storage period of which are known precisely. Nevertheless, if we move away from the experts, how can we classify Ljuba Popović assuming a responsible position of an amateur, even if we have seen the works of many painters? Perhaps as a painter whose touch is immediately recognized regardless of the format of the painting we are looking at, not by the scholastic discipline revealed in the stroke, but solely by the figural quality specific to him, so that we can say, with certainty: "This is Ljuba Popović!" As a person whose approach to painting is purely intuitive, I identify his paintings by the energy they emanate, as well as by the parallelism of stories and motifs, almost isolated worlds flouncing parallelly throughout Popović's opus and especially in his large-scale paintings. The repeated experience of any of his paintings has never been the same

even if I returned to a painting only after a short while – literally, every time there was a new reading (it is irrelevant whether my reading was right or wrong, the apprehension was inevitable).

It is a convenient coincidence that the same space where the paintings by Professor Marko Čelebonović were put on display months ago will now host the exhibition of his student Ljubomir Popović, although both of them are now in the realms of no return. In this fragile continuity, with these authentic and idiosyncratic figures at its ends, the idea of unprecedented dedication threads like a watchword – according to his friends, Popović could work nine to thirteen hours a day.

The Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts proudly acknowledges the presence of Ljubomir Popović in its ranks. Although he was upset by the odd claim that the "Serbian substance" is insufficient in his painting, he stands out among the prominent Serbian painters whose oeuvre has reached a universal scale and who make us happy for being «ours» (although this controversy is yet to be settled by Belgrade and Valjevo). The author of these lines is aware of the

misunderstandings of the past, but he finds it provincial to deal with them before Ljuba Popović's paintings, some of which are exhibited in Belgrade for the first time. It is essential, as I see it, that Ljubomir Popović is now in his city, in the gallery of his house, with an audience

happy to see his paintings. And perhaps it is precisely this homecoming welcome that we should capture as well!

Vladimir S. Kostić

President of the Serbian Academy
of Sciences and Arts



Styx-banks, 2015
Oil on canvas, 100 × 100 cm



Nikola Kusovac

..... Ljuba: close up

"In the sixty years of uninterrupted activity, Ljuba succeeded in taming a whole world, as vividly evidenced by his paintings."

Alain Vuillot

Although I was deeply affected by the death of the painter Ljuba Popović, who was my host over the past two or three decades (more precisely, since the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the country that he loved and lamented, when he had to shift from the Adriatic to the Aegean Sea) in the village of Xiropotami, near Ierissos and the boundary of Mount Athos, it was only after some time that I was able to feel the true weight of his (to me) unexpected departure of no return. This feeling was especially palpable when the house where we stayed together for many years, and where we sometimes lived together, and where the kind and diligent owner provided Ljuba with a small studio, in which many of his major works loomed or were created, was suddenly pervaded with unbearable silence. Not only that the unparalleled grill master

(I had never met anyone who had been able to roast so well the fish I hunt or the meet we bought, while burning so little wood and coal) was not there, but there was no one to argue, and even quarrel fervently, with me. These quarrels were often heavy and grave, and an observer would have thought that we had been irreconcilable enemies.

Ljuba could not understand or accept that I wrote and spoke with praise about some artists he believed to be utterly undeserving of praise. Much to my regret, he was often, though not always, unmistakably right. His most severe offence in such situations, intended to hurt me, was that I was no better than most of his critics who, like Živorad Žika Stojković, resented that there was nothing Serbian in his painting only because they failed to capture its essence. I futilely strove to explain that he had the right to look at art in accordance with his aesthetic and poetic concepts, because he defended his own attitudes and views on artistic creation, whereas I was obliged, as an art historian and art critic, to approach the quintessence of art without prejudice, and, in this respect, I was especial-



ly not supposed to be burdened by my own preferences and feelings. And I ineffectively quoted Nikola Tesla who once said that, if he had achieved anything significant in his life, he was happy that it had been the work of a Serb, because Ljuba always proudly declared himself as a Serb – especially at the time when the entire Serbian nation was portrayed as evil – though he was truly a Yugoslav. With defiant pleasure, he was explaining that he did not agree to adjust his name, extremely difficult to pronounce by the French, to the French phonetics. He was convinced that his work would make them utter it, though falteringly – just like it actually happened.

One of our verbal fights has left an especially strong imprint in my mind, which means that I was painfully affected by the inexcusable mistake I made. It had to do with his improvised studio at Xiropotami. This small working area, about ten square metres in size, had three concrete walls that could be used for painting. They were about two to three metres wide and about two and a half metres high and we would fasten several canvases using adhesive strips because nails could not be hammered into concrete. As a rule, there were three large canvases, i.e. 130 × 160 cm, and four to five smaller pieces, between 65/80 × 55/70 cm. Unfortunately, the western wall was narrower, as it con-

tained a door connecting the house and the studio, the eastern wall was pierced with an equally wide door leading to the yard, while on the north side, there was no wall and Ljuba closed it with a movable solid, transparent plastic screen, protecting him from frequent winds and rare but stormy summer rains. Anyway, the daylight in the room was uneven, due to which many paintings done in Greece were examined, finished and signed in Paris, under the impeccable, zenithal light in his studio. A painting was completed once Ljuba noted down the title on its back, along with his signature and a typical sign, as well as the year and the place where it was painted. According to him, this happened when he felt that colour and other dissonances were harmonized, that appropriate colour chords were accented – in brief, once he felt that the painting resound with symphonic harmony.

In the corner of this so-called 'Greek studio', beside the door leading from the house into the workspace, there was a small table where he kept his palette, usually a tin or plastic tray (which I would buy, as needed, in the nearby lerissos), then paint tubes, brushes, various bottles with mediums, varnishes and unavoidable turpentine, or white spirit, many pieces of cloth of various sizes, and paper, to remove the paint mistakenly placed on canvas, a big alarm clock,



alcohol, a mirror with plain and magnifying glass, and a pair of scissors, for his personal use (to cut his beard and hair) and, sometimes, for cutting adhesive tapes that he used to attach canvas to the wall, as well as eye drops, because he had chronic eye inflammation.

In the well-equipped studio, he worked daily from 9 AM to 1 PM. Then, there was a lunch, to “fill the emptiness in the stomach”. Ljuba would be overly angry and he would furiously reproach me if I had returned late from fishing, be it as little as half an hour. After a meal, which was never too abundant, we would discuss for an hour, over a dessert, mostly what we had read, or cinematography, especially the early Russian films, which we loved, e.g. the works of Sergei Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Dziga Vertov, etc., recalling, at the same time, the films of our childhood, from *Jolly Fellows*, *Heavenly Slug*, *We Are from Kronstadt*, and so on, to the *Symphony of Life*. After that, he liked to relax for a while and then, he would go to the studio, either to paint or to look at what he had already put on the canvas. This observation, the silent dialogue with visions and creatures that had emerged from somewhere and began to take shape on the canvas, was an equally important stage in his work as a painter. Before dusk, when the sea calmed down, he would swim a couple of hundred metres or even a whole kilo-

metre, from the place where we entered into the sea to the place opposite the house of his and our French friends, the retired military officer Allen and his wife, Mylène. One of our invitations to lunch, in return for our French friends’ hospitality – as they would arrange a lunch for us as soon as they arrived in Xiropotami – led to a reproach that I would never forget, a reproach that largely explains Ljuba’s approach to the painter’s vocation.

On the day when Mylène and Allen were supposed to be our guests at lunch, I, as always, prepared more food than needed – due to which Ljuba always criticized me for behaving in a primitive Balkan manner, unlike the French, who were rational and never exaggerated regarding food. The sky got overcast. The balcony where we received guests was not covered (it was later covered by Serbian workers from Hilandar’s estate in Kakovica, i.e. Arsenica). As I was afraid that it would rain, I suggested, tactlessly and thoughtlessly, to set the table in his studio. Ljuba looked at me, astonished, with blazing eyes, as he thundered out: “You must’ve learned nothing during all this time we’ve spent together, when such a stupid idea could occur to you! How could we gobble in a room where art is created, where one paints, and where paintings are placed!?” Blasphemy, pure horror. For him, this place was a sublime temple of the spirit, the



aura of which would be destroyed by the mundane urge for a digestive harmony or anything else that had to do with bodily indulgence. There was nothing left to me but to admit, feebly and humbly, the careless and intolerable slip and realize, once for all, the extent to which Ljuba was dedicated to his creative vocation, and to comprehend the meaning that painting had to him.

At the same time, the studio, his workspace, was his true sanctuary of the spirit, which was not to be desecrated by any bodily indulgence or pleasure. This was the place where one could discuss literature, comics, and, especially, cinematography. It was not advisable to start a conversation about the paintings he was working on. He would get angry over comments made after observing for a few minutes the paintings that he had been working on, parallelly, for days, weeks, and sometimes even months. He considered it extremely inappropriate, and even unfair, to judge casually, superficially and on impulse his efforts, which required a lot of creative patience, attention, reflection and searching for optimal solutions, often accompanied with hesitation and even wandering. He was relentless if I made a positive comment or uttered an unwise praise for something, more precisely for some detail on his paintings. For him, this was an alarm, sparking the fear of a dangerous

or seductive appeal, and the following day, the detail could no longer be found in the paintings. In this respect, he was particularly alerted and prone to radical reactions if someone whose visual culture he found doubtful made flattering comments expressing satisfaction with his work. Furthermore, any private association of visitors, who often gave way to their imagination while standing in front of his paintings, was intolerable for him. For example, a very close person was never forgiven for saying that one of his waterfalls resembled the waterfall in Jajce. This attitude, although justified in terms of protecting the creative process from disruptive and detrimental incursions, made him groan, express disquiet, which was often justified, saying in the plural: "If we could only avoid becoming sulky old people". And, naturally, this could not be avoided. Over time, I discover in my own behaviour the symptoms of a sulky and resentful old man more often and more intensively.

In fact, the years that we spent together and all the fruits of our decade-long association helped me discover Ljuba's true creative nature and grasp firmly the nature of his aesthetic doctrine, according to which the greatest threat for a painting was to "become a representation of something, to lose all of its pictorial power and be merely an illustration or a story". More precisely, he



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firmly believed that the quintessence of a painting, its main subject, must be, as he put it briefly, painting itself! Perhaps it is now appropriate to add the qualifier 'integral'.

The beginnings of Ljuba's journey to integral painting are associated with his settlement in Belgrade in 1953, when he was briefly a student of art history at the Faculty of Philosophy and History, while also attending a course of painting and drawing in the then famous Art School in Šumatovačka Street, led by the prominent pedagogue and prematurely forgotten sculptor Radivoje Lala Subotički. In fact, this was the inadvertent preparation for the entrance exam at the Belgrade Academy of Applied Arts, where he studied between 1954 and 1957, more precisely until he moved to the Academy of Fine Arts to become a student of the supportive Professor Marko Čelebonović, who had just been elected a corresponding member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SASA). Ljuba graduated in his class in 1959 and gained the right to continue his studies as a postgraduate student, which he did, first with Čelebonović and later with his close friend, Milo Milunović, a full SASA member since 1958. It is noteworthy that in the late 1950s, during Ljuba's studies and artistic formation, most artists in Yugoslavia, excluding his tutors, were under a strong influence of the current

international poetics – more precisely, various types of abstract art and *Art Informel*, which were also supported by the most influential Yugoslav art critics. Nevertheless, as far as Serbian art was concerned, there were still many reputable artists who abided by tradition and did not depart from the established, and tested in practice, poetics of figurative art. They primarily included the painters whose artistic formation occurred between the two world wars, the most prominent among whom – besides Ljuba's tutors Milunović and Čelebonović – were Jovan Bijelić, Zora Petrović, Ivan Radović, Stojan Aralica, Đorđe Andrejević Kun, Moša Pijade, Petar Lubarda, Milan Konjović, Predrag Peđa Milosavljević, Živorad Nastasijević, Vasa Pomorišac, Mihailo Petrov, Mladen Josić, Đorđe Popović, Ljubica Cuca Sokić, Ivan Tabaković, Nedeljko Gvozdenović, Nikola Bešević, Dragoslav Stojanović Sip and many others, not to mention the contemporary sculptors and graphic artists.

At the same time, the art scene in Serbia witnessed the rise of somewhat younger artists who also painted in the spirit of the so-called *figuration*. The most prominent among them were those who conformed, according to Miodrag B. Protić, to the loosely defined and understood poetics of the magical, oneiric and fantastic. The most fruitful contribution in this respect was made by



Milan Popović, Bogoljub Jovanović, Igor Vasiljev, Dado Đurić, Uroš Tošković, and the artists assembled around the group Mediala. Theoretically and practically, the fundamental nature of Mediala's art was embodied in the work of Leonid Šejka and Siniša Vuković, on the one hand, and Miro Glavurčić, on the other. While for Šejka painting was a form of prayer, due to which his aesthetic credo evolved from pessimistic and destructive to optimistic and humanistic, embodied in a theoretical and practical pursuit of an 'integral picture', the mystic Glavurčić, as an extreme pessimist, was prone to destructing classical ideals and humanistic values. Among Mediala's members, Šejka's spirit and concept of image was also epitomized in the work of Milovan Vidak, Svetozar Samurović and Kosta Bradić, as well as Olja Ivanjicki, with her universal, and Milić Stanković, with his markedly national approach to life and art. As opposed to them, Vlada Veličković, who had much in common with them in particular respects, generally remained on the trail of Glavurčić's concept of art, based on the aesthetics of the ugly. This partially applies to Ljuba's works from the 1950s and the early 1960s, which evolved towards the disintegration of the traditional painting structure and the humanistic myth as a whole.

Having passed through a complex development phase, initiated during his

formation at the art academies in Belgrade and brought to a climax during his first years in Paris (the experts on Ljuba's oeuvre, which was homogeneous in iconographic rather than in pictorial terms, described this phase as the disintegration in death or in eroticism), over the following two or three decades, Ljuba developed a peculiar and authentic pictorial poetics, the aesthetic essence of which is not easy to define. In this context, Milenko Radović, Ljuba's close friend from Valjevo, an expert on his work and the author of several valuable monographic studies on his art, is right in observing that Ljuba "was referred to as a member of Mediala, a representative of surrealist, fantastic or metaphysical painting", and that, in some extreme cases, he was associated with some para-scientific or quasi-mystical systems, or that he was even identified as a successful interpreter of existential human frustrations, alienation, suffering, pain, and so on. However, all of these "laudators" (as Radović calls Ljuba's biographers and interpreters of his art) remained empty-handed, allegedly because Ljuba "outplayed them with lucidity and invincible creative enthusiasm". Of course, though his lucidity and invincible creative enthusiasm are indisputable, we must also mention his exceptionally wide knowledge of art, literature, art history and aesthetics, as well as the passionate love of film and



comics, because the crucial values of his painting rest precisely upon these foundations.

It is true that Ljuba's creative output is really difficult to 'put in a drawer' bearing a common style label – as it is too often done by lucid or enthusiastic art critics, historians and theorists – without being concerned whether the artist's legs or head would be left outside once the drawer is closed. One should, as Ljuba actually suggested, remain indifferent to the compulsion of classifying and labelling, and limit oneself to carefully analyzing the peculiarities of his creative practice, perceiving his af-

finities, and identifying the values which he discovered in Paris and on frequent journeys across Europe and around the world, which he subsequently enhanced and polished due to his indisputably great enthusiasm.

One should simply seek to discover why Ljuba followed the trail of Van Eyck and Holbein, how he reacted once he found himself in front of the original works of Perugino or Dali, and what his close encounter with the works of El Greco, Velasquez and Goya in Spain was like. One should elucidate how he felt when he first stepped into the Louvre in Paris and found himself in front



of the works of Vermeer, Pieter Brueghel, Nicolas Poussin, or what was the significance of the visit to the memorial museum of Gustave Moreau for him and his painting, or what impression was made on him by the works of Puvis de Chavannes, Pinckney Marcius-Simons, Jean Delville, Fernand Knopf, James Ensor, Arnold Böcklin, Paul Delvaux, René Magritte, and especially Ivan Konstantinovich Aivazovsky, and so on, because this would mean discovering the path of Ljuba's unfathomable invocation of light, i.e. his pursuit of integral painting. Also, one must understand the role played along this path by the encounters and creative friendship with figures such as Marko and Aleksa Čelebonović, Živojin Žika Pavlović, Miodrag Dado Đurić, Ginette – the daughter of the painter Paul Signac, then the Parisian gallery owners Armand Zerbib and, in particular, Thessa Herold, or the acquaintance with theoreticians and art critics, such as René de Solier, Jacques Kermoal, Patrick Waldberg, André Pieyre de Mandiargues, Jean-Clarence Lambert, Sam Hunter, Alain Bosquet, Anne Tronche, Isaure de Saint-Pierre, Gustav René Hocke, Michel Lancelot, José Pierre, Alain Vuillot, as well as Milan Komnenić, Branko Kukić, Jovica Aćin, Novica Milić and, above all, Milenko Radović. In this respect, his creative encounters with filmmakers or television presenters, such as Michel Lancelot, Philippe Prince,

Walerian Borovczyk, Jean-Marie Drot, César Sunfeld, Ilja Slani, Petar Nedeljković, Boro Krivokapić, Marina Rajević Savić, Zorica Pantelić, Jasmina Simić, etc., are also noteworthy.

Valuable information could certainly be found in Ljuba's personal notes, which more or less fully cover the period between 1957 and 2013, and which he privately called *Day's Temperature*. If one is to rely on the information that I managed to obtain from him on two or three occasions, he noted down his intimate moods and reflections on the art of painting and the paintings he was working on. While persistently claiming that neither writing nor speaking were the media through which he could express himself properly, he still wrote out hundreds of pages. A serious and diligent art historian could certainly use them, one day, as a guiding line through Ljuba's painstaking but nonetheless exciting journey to what he tentatively called 'the integral picture'. I recall that he once told me about the visit made to his studio by the famous French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, in the late 1970s. According to Ljuba, Lacan kept on asking strange questions, failing to observe that all the answers could already be found in the paintings. Lacan assumed, like many others before and after him, that the obtained information could fit into his own theoretical system. Very of-



ten disheartened and discouraged by observers' reactions to his paintings, Ljuba was worried about their fate and, as the time was passing, one could get the impression that he was increasingly lonely in his own world. With the exception of the honourable and devoted Michel Poux, it became difficult to find art collectors whose views or comments revealed any similarity with his universe, and it was almost impossible to find a partner for conversation who would throw light on a pictorial problem in a novel and productive manner.

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Alain Vuillot offers an excellent illustration of the significance that some persons from Ljuba's student period, as well as their works and actions, had for him as a painter. It was thanks to the advice of Marko Čelebonović that Ljuba learned crucial creative secrets – namely those that enabled him to find the path leading towards the goal, or, more precisely, to the ideal of integral painting, which was the “absolute priority” for him, throughout his life. Thanks to the advice of his tutor, to whom he complained that he had problems to “finish a painting”, Ljuba realized that “pictorial space can be expanded and multiplied infinitely”. He realized that “each part of a painting must function by itself and that at the same time it must have a meaning in a broader context, in relation to the whole of the picture”. However, it should be borne

in mind that Ljuba never approached a work, either a drawing or a painting, or a particular detail, with a predetermined goal; he never had a predefined theme and he never relied on previously prepared sketches and studies, not even in case of rare commissions that he had accepted. It happened on several occasions that he accepted a commission, to completely disappoint the commissioner's expectations because his work was driven solely by the creative impulses arising from his permanent and everyday dialogue with the painting. Due to this, each of his works was more or less an exciting creative adventure the outcome of which was totally unknown.

In the struggle with painting materials, which often took the form of a drama with mutual casualties, the situation was constantly changing. It would sometimes become radically different, to the point that it was impossible to guess what was going on in the painting in the process of making it and, finally, what happened, once it was finished. It is precisely in this creative uncertainty (which, as a rule, lasted until the last moment of the work on a painting, drawing, print or a watercolour, until the moment when he announced the victory of the spirit over matter, by putting his signature and a sign, usually on the back of the painting) that one is to seek for the explanation why the interpreters of his work



remained largely empty-handed, or, as Ljuba put it, why they made a wild shot in the dark. He often quoted the words of a famous painter who, commenting on the texts written about him and his artistic work, said “this is nice, it’s only that they basically didn’t understand anything”.

Finally, there is a strong impression that the rising light of the integral picture, in which every detail is equally important as the overall impression, brought the elements of vivacity and joy of creation, which largely (but not entirely) dispelled the darkness of ominous existential perplexity in Ljuba’s work over the last decades of his life, overpowering it and pushing it to the margin. He confided in me once that, in the early period of his work, he built his internal fears, troubles and nausea into the paintings, which certainly burdened them. The change took place once he came to feel that his paintings provided shelter and salvation, once he began to create spaces “bringing rest to the soul”. Since then, fears and nausea remained where they naturally belonged, although they occasionally sneaked out, in the form of disturbing pictorial visions. This process was especially apparent since the 1990s, when, for example, *Sun’s Death* receded for a moment before the *Yellow Chords of Heaven*; it was even more striking when *The Kiss of Death* remained deeply buried in the *Burial Place*, or when a whole se-

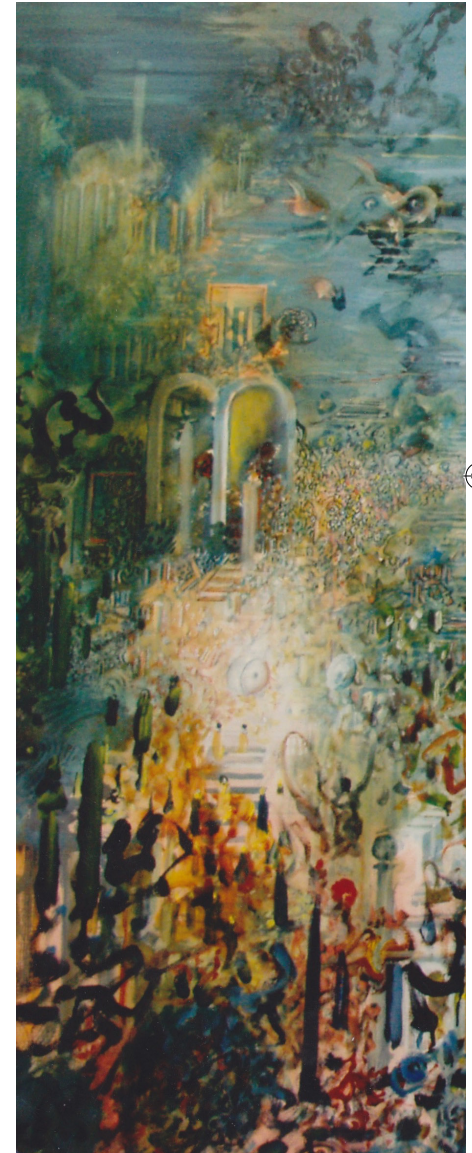




ries of paintings emerged – *The Secret of a Gold Ruin*, *The Revelation of Truth*, *Glass Cathedrals or Devil's Caves*, *The Secret of the Garden of Lilacs*, *The Dream of a Byzantine City*, *Yellow Light*, *The Rise of a Water Cross*, *Under the Sign of the Cross*, *Blue Monasteries*, *Harmonious Depot*, *Lolita or The Blue City*, *Flame* (painted in 2004 in the close vicinity of the burnt dormitory of the Hilandar monastery, with the idea of donating money from its purchase to the monastery, for the reconstruction), as well as *The Dream of Poisonous Flowers*, *The Signs of the Deluge*, *The Landscape of the White Moon* and *Is There an Afterlife?*

In brief, this gallery clearly shows that Ljuba as a mature painter chose a form of new symbolism, that he had passed a long and thorny creative path, burdened with many temptations, which led him to a kind of total painting, the desired integral picture, in which every detail is in every respect equally significant and valuable as the whole or is, in fact, a whole in itself. Due to this, his picture, and his painting oeuvre, cannot be easily and finally experienced, comprehended and, once and for all, evaluated. Quite the contrary, something new is always discovered in them, something that has escaped attention, something requiring further, deeper and more meticulous interpretation. He was truly right when he grunted over and resented superficial approaches to his work, perceiving them

as an insult and depreciation of his efforts, of the many days, weeks, months, and sometimes even years spent before the canvas, seeking the harmony, known only to him, between details and the whole.

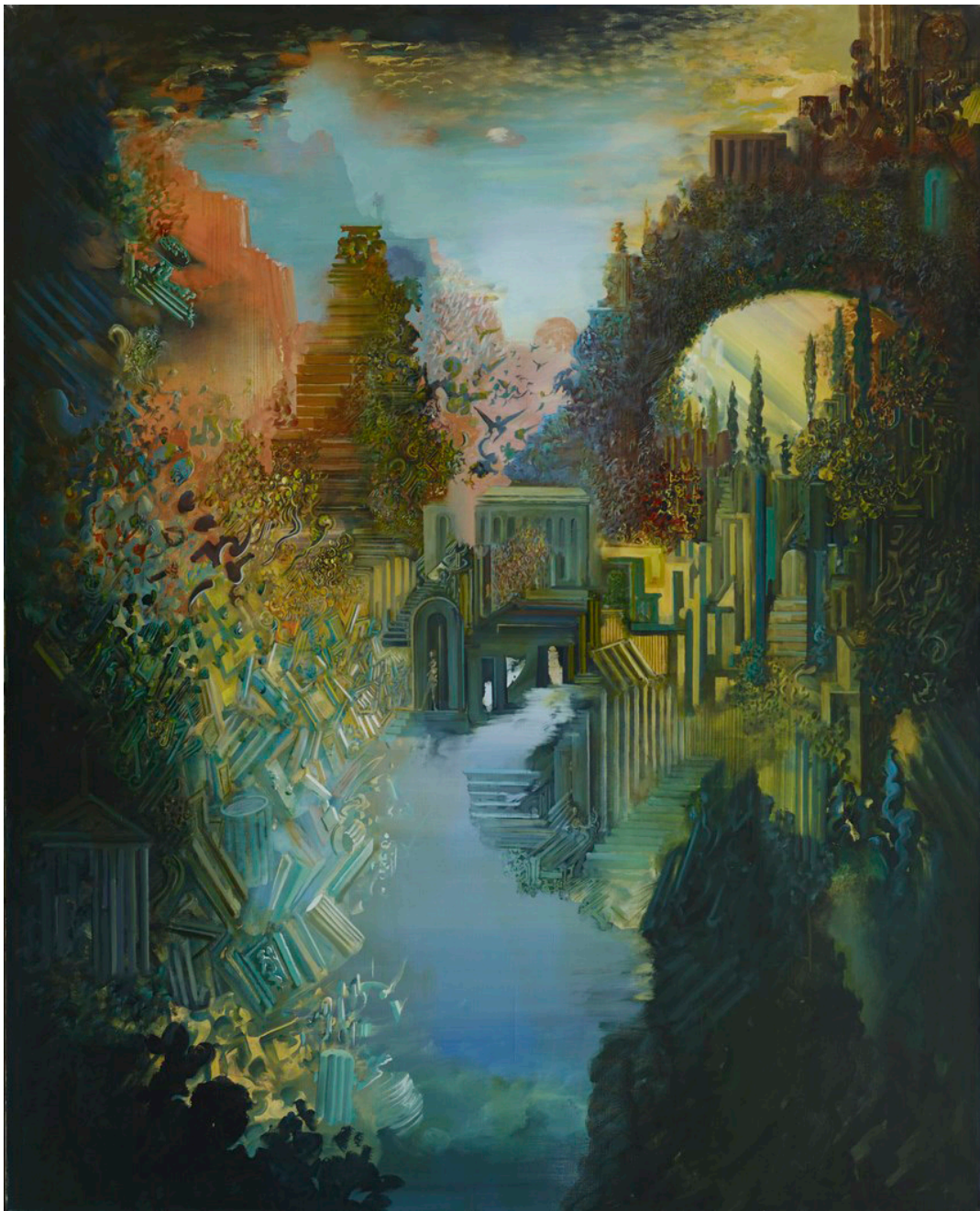




The trail that Ljuba generously left behind along the six-decade long route merited him a notable place in encyclopaedias, lexicons and reviews of contemporary international, European and

French art. This place is especially important, prominent, lasting and crucial in the history of Serbian art.





Prisoner of Fribourg, 1985

Oil on canvas, 162 × 130 cm





Alain Vuillot

..... The Flash of a Secret

What does it mean to be a painter in unfortunate times? What is it that today, when offered to the gaze, can rise above the horizon of our murky provinces, to shed light on this West, which is now, more than ever, the region of sunset? Actually, the planetary rule of technology is prepared to saturate the visual space, to neutralise it with a flood of images, to deprive it of every light, every enigma. This, undoubtedly, urges each artist to re-examine the power of his art from that angle, to challenge the eternal, un-reducible force of his strokes that only spread some pigment over the canvas. What Ljuba had indebted us with is perhaps, more than anything else, this demonstration of the permanence of art and its sources, a defiant confirmation of the vitality of painting that opposes the rising nihilism of history. In our times, there are not many painters who are sufficiently lucid to avoid the false values of formalism and anti-art, false debates about figuration and abstraction, false bravery in destruction and oblivion. If it is true that tradition can be undermined only if captured and subjected, Ljuba's painting opens up

unimaginable and predominantly revolutionary spaces through its constant dialogue with the masters of classical art.

A painter can rarely show so subtly the essence of a secret, the shining aura where it has its refuge, or the dark gleam it uses to embellish itself. The telluric space of the canvas breaks at certain places in the form of isolated explosions and reveals the foci of radiation that engender figures with their aura. The excessive, infinite light, endows the visual with magnetic qualities in its whirling and chaotic movement. The bodies, frozen to transparency, are expelled, ruined, dissociated, under the thrust of the forces that imbue them. The blooming of the perceptible is unavoidably ended in its evanescence in the light that has made it visible. The dismembering of the physical, the panicky circling of shock-waves, the turbulence of the particles seem to be just echoes of a secret and more perfidious pulsation. That pre-harmonic rhythm, that beating, is multiplied in the bright habitat of the canvas, it is life itself struggling between clarity and darkness,



between the manifest and the hidden. There is obviously in Ljuba's living natures a certain Heraclitean dimension: between hiding and revealing, between the open and the closed, the cosmic nature embodies with its catastrophic opulence a pregnant night that brings it forth and takes it away.

This phenomenology of night is not limited only to the area of personal day-dreaming and this fact separates Ljuba's works from pure and simple surrealism. It would be no exaggeration if Ljuba's pictorial searches with a gnostic gesture of a completely different dimension were related to topographical searches into the depth of beings. Ljuba suggests that dimension of retreat, essentially linked to the outburst of the perceptible, with his paradoxical use of the light-dark relationships, with a masterly deconstruction of the laws of perspective, with a constant ambiguity of the game of appearance and disappearance played by both objects and bodies. Still, as much as this exit into the light of day is enveloped in darkness, it always follows the logic of a Dionysian chaos: the canvas is not just a completed assembly of visual elements, it embodies the movement of its own fulfilment, the initial sparkling of its own explosion. The metamorphic presence of the floral element, the eruptive tectonics of the surfaces, the organic mul-

tiplication of the matter lead the gaze to plunge into the physics of explosion and swelling, into the luxurious physics where limited time connects the flash-like light with a slow ascension of the elements. Here, everything is still sunken into the play of infinite birth. Bodies and objects are only partially differentiated from their magmatic circulation and their airy divisions: forms arrested for a moment because no choice is possible, irresolute between the completion of structure and return into formlessness. That matrix appears to be a space that delivers forms of short life whose darkness is interwoven with a mysterious fire. The light contact with this appearing world is invoked by the painter's brush accepting the risk that a rapid corrosive growth of its own making would show on the canvas. This primordial dissipation affects that boiling flourish of perceived forms, sprays around the germs of essence in form of a magical monadology. The pigment epidemics of strokes, the convulsive power of pictorial traces, the masterful distribution of blots into transparent bouquets transpose onto canvas the energetic dynamics of the exploded order.

The harmonious tension that brings into the picture its twinkling and rhythm is not reduced only to that unpeaceable dance of texture. A kind of "pregnant



plasma” in broiling incandescence is transformed here into molecular sprouting. A ray of latent fire radiates from those numerous glowing centres so that it becomes a conspicuous radiation of a whole alchemy of cinnabar and cobalt, mixed with blue algae and blazes of heat. Germs of breath are secretly swelling in those hovering hearths. Still, darker zones envelop the newly born forms in the margins of chromatic radiation: as the fruit of abysmal chasms, these dismembered figures retain the dark aura of Mother Earth. As counterpoints to the symphony of polychromatic light sources, these nooks and recesses of space are only aggressive murmurs, the rustling of humus, or whispering of shadows. Pitted by abysses and caves, burrowed by carvings and curves, the surface of the canvas writes a geology of the Apocalypse and reveals within the fibre of the world a geometry of drunkenness, the semen opulence in its opal night.

This optical joy transferred to the observer by Ljuba’s canvases is not founded only on that loose matter generated by the sun and thunder, it stems also from numerous traps that disorient and hypnotise the gaze: anamorphoses and decentralised perspectives, the fractal depth and multiplication of infinities bring about a paradoxical and incomprehensible space, resembling

the piece of endlessness contained in the abysmal space of the image. Here, architecture is introduced in order to balance the line of the Dionysian flood of the matter: the panicky dispersion is confronted by the a-temporal order of arcades and columns, of buried cities and aerial ruins. However, this is not only about a prismatic fantasy of a surrealistic Euclid, but primarily about the visual search beyond the visible, towards the point where, according to André Breton, “high and low are no longer perceived as opposites”. If it is true that architectural refinement is made up of an expertly shaped mixture of crystal and marble, it happens because mannerism here borders on gnosis. Be it the ambiguous light of evening blue or the mist of crashed sun, the musical garden Ljuba invites us into seduces the gaze in order to open it up for the coming mystery: in that immeasurable labyrinthine depth *illusion* is playing with the *illusory* and outplays it.

If Ljuba’s vertical line is architectural, then the curved line is sensual. Meandering, it suggests with its lascivious outlines the curving of the body. In time, the sombre bodies from his first paintings become lighter and even lecherous. Everything is happening as if the human body is liberating around itself thousands of monads of its life force: it is no longer the body that envelops the



soul but the soul envelops the body with molecular whirlwinds. The explosion of the principle of individuation is manifest in graphic continuity that connects organic, floral and mineral elements. Also, the latent crossbreeding confuses the differences between living matter and inert structures; a constant metamorphosis mixes into rhizomes carnal gardens and floral flesh. Even sexual differences are confused by the bi-polarity obvious in certain bodies and faces. And at last, Ljuba's pictorial expression realises an indistinction between the physics and metaphysics, a kind of mystical materialisation phrased as a "merciless ordeal by flowers", according to André Pieyre de Mandiargues.

However, not even this paradoxical vitalism is devoid of ambivalence because within it even the difference between life and death has been subjected to deconstruction. The corrosive whiteness acquires the nuances of rainbow colours in contact with organic forms, classifying them and devouring them one after another. Within the heart of the cosmic eruption there is always a fragile and silent human presence, both desired and intimidating at the same time. The bodies devoured by the dawn, bodies dispersed, bodies before life and after death. The deathly paleness and complex anatomy imitate the ambiguity of human desire when it

submits to something that exceeds its limits: the eroticism of the perishable is bordered here with sacred shudder. The ethics and eroticism, that dispersed passion, attracts and rejects depending on whether it offers its presence or denies it. Never totally present, never totally absent, it is the transparent shadow, the torn chimera a gaze can never encompass in its totality. If the horror of beauty arrives into these images like an echo of a sacred feast, it would be caused by the vibration of the body in unison with the cosmos participating in its harrowing opulence.

The phenomenon of such painting in this historic moment is by no means accidental. It appears at the time when, under the growing dominance of Technology, man is inclined to understand everything offered to him in the world as a problem that could be solved by operational methods. The experience of our human existence and our life on earth seems to be getting ever poorer, as if today it cannot find a chance to express and ascertain itself in an authentic way. In contact with its time, the artist is seemingly required to research the secret reverse of time, to find the natural, original and silent foundation that History itself originates from. Ljuba's painting is a part of that renewed discovery of the primordial forces of an individual and the cosmos. And if vi-



sionary, if it is the carrier of future, then it does so in a marvellous revelation of the forgotten luxury of the enigmatic and tormenting entity that both gives us life and blows us to pieces.

The man I knew towards the end of the last century was very much like his paintings – mysterious even in his confidences, brilliant even in his silence. I remember from his studio in the street Val de Grâce a well of light with an ageless garden, a kind of cathedral covered with Baroque vegetation. The traces of our conversations, partially recorded on paper or tape, can be found in the next part of this text. I take this opportunity to express my appreciation to Ljuba's wife Slavica for helping me interpret some of Ljuba's statements.

If it is true that certain dynamism extends the research of the *sensitive* from the matter to the voice, this is so because it contains a certain sense that passes through it unhindered, a sense that is older than the strokes or the words. In that regard, it was not meaningless to try and enlighten through dialogue what the painter could have revealed with his own means, to expand the perspective which had already been opened on the canvas by the painter's initial and silent experience. It is the first thing that astounds anyone who

listens to such an artist as Ljuba was, whose works just like the man himself, confirm an authentic contemplative experience. Although situated on the margins of his visual creative activity, Ljuba's personal commentaries, for years recorded in his journals, consume the juices from the same mysterious source: Ljuba was one of rare artists whose words truly expressed the signals coming from his paintings. The same universe was magically rising and shaping when he talked in carefully selected words, about his exceptional views of the world and art. In that regard, his communications inspired by the canvases he would show to the visitors in his Paris studio, are truly unique. A spatial room, transparent ceiling, white walls without windows, with big canvases leaning on them. The space, a *habitat* where the painter lived and moved around cautiously. The tone in which he revealed to you the kind of magic that was regularly day-dreamed in the silence of that "sun trap", was the tone of confession, of shared secret. His Slavic accent, the measured slow flow of his sentences, his gaze turned inwards, endowed this man with an eerie charm: Ljuba appeared to be returning from those uncharted regions reflected in his works by a myriad of scattered mirrors. Anyway, did he not lead a double life, divided between his family home located only a few steps away



and his studio where he painted, drew, wrote and meditated with his eyes wide open? In the sixty years of uninterrupted activity, Ljuba succeeded in taming a whole world, as vividly evidenced by his paintings.

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Empire of Satan, 2015—2016

Oil on canvas, 190 × 250 cm





..... Conversations with Ljuba

A. V.: *Tell us something about your earliest childhood memories, those that you have cherished to the present day.*

Ljuba - I was born in 1934, in Tuzla, a city located today in Bosnia and Herzegovina. At that time the country was called the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. I was the only child. We lived on a lonely farm, by the road from Tuzla to Zvornik. My father had had a house built there, with a grocery store, a tavern and other auxiliary outhouses. He also traded a little, with Serbia. He must have been a successful businessman since he owned an automobile with a driver and several servants. A young man called Stevan looked after me all the time. He frequently took me to the nearby rivulet. He would lower his hand into the water and pull out river crabs from the reeds. I remember the bright red colour of their shells; it strongly impressed me. And it is that intensive and pure red, the cadmium red that I use today whenever I need an accent in my painting.

A bus passed regularly every day along the road between Serbia and Bosnia. Without stopping, the driver would throw

through his window a copy of the *Politika* daily my father subscribed to. It was my task to gather the newspaper immediately before the wind blew it around. One day, something coloured fell out of the paper. It was the first issue of *Politikin zabavnik*, an illustrated magazine for children, although its head said it was meant for the general public aged seven to seventy-seven. Since *Politikin zabavnik* was first published in 1938, I must have been about four years old then. I asked my mother, excited, to read me the cartoons from *Zabavnik*, about the brave tailor Mickey and others as well. I was in heaven, sitting in my mother's lap, absorbing the stories and looking at the wonderful, coloured imaginary world. Later on, in my advanced age, this nostalgia about the first impressions was so acute that I bought from a collector all of the pre-war issues of *Zabavnik*.

One story I read in the papers, by accident and long ago, also left its mark on my personality. *Politika* used to publish then novels in instalments, novels of all genres: historic, detective, fantastic... We used to cut out those pages and keep them just as people keep books. One day



I found a science-fiction novel that impressed me profoundly. The main character, a farmer or a peasant, was digging a hole in his estate looking for water. Several metres below the surface his hoe hit something very hard. It was the metal of a huge spherical object – that might be the reason for all those spheres in my paintings. Soon afterwards, he found a rusty door, opened it and entered a kind of labyrinth. In its centre there was a huge piece of ice, a kind of sarcophagus keeping the body of an extremely beautiful woman he immediately fell in love with. Her name was Earani. He used to come every day in order to look at her and one day, when he could no longer bear it, he lit a fire. The block of ice melted and the body of the beautiful woman disintegrated into dust. It disappeared – as if beauty had to be unattainable in order to remain attractive.

I also remember my first visit to a cinema, naturally, with my mother. Before the beginning of the screening, a magician showed some of his tricks. Then the curtain in front of the screen was raised and – I remembered the scene for my whole life – horses galloped towards me. One of them fell down. It upset me greatly, and then there came another scene – two huge, angry black men were hitting each other with full strength. The fear overwhelmed me so much that I ran out screaming. Mother was very angry and

dissatisfied, since she could not see the film because of my behaviour. Many years later, when watching some old documentaries in Paris, I discovered that the scene which frightened me so much was the box match for world champion between Joe Louis and Max Schmeling. Both the scene with the horses and the one with boxers were in the newsreel (current events from the country and world) shown regularly before the film.

When I gather like this all my childhood memories, I see that I was a gentle and timid child. I did not dare go to the end of the garden because there, under the strawberries, was the grave of my parents' first child. A son. I was also afraid of old things in the attic dusk. I was frightened to death when once the policemen came into the tavern leading two bandits bound in chains. My parents were very considerate towards me, although mother could show her strict and relentless face. They let me sleep between them in their big bed. The warmth and the feeling of security I felt then have remained with me throughout my life as symbols of supreme bliss.

1. It was the novel by Australian writer Earl Cox, *Out of Silence* (1919) and the story evolves somewhat differently: there is no lighting of fire, nor melting of the ice block, but the beautiful and wise Earani is killed by the jealous farmer's fiancée. The change that took place in Ljuba's memories is a picturesque illustration of his own relationship to beauty and creation. Both disappear when we insist on penetrating their secret.



A. V.: *Before the Second World War you were forced for security reasons to move to Serbia..*

Ljuba - Yes, had we not left we would have been victims in the slaughters performed over the Serbs by the Nazi oriented Muslims. We had a comfortable house in Valjevo. Father had bought it one or two years earlier, as advised by one of his "business partners". However, we enjoyed nothing of that comfort since at the very beginning of the war German officers had settled in the house. The three of us lived in one little room and the kitchen, accessible through the courtyard.

In the yard, my father had a shed built to dry meat there. He also arranged a small space in one corner of the shed for me, to keep my rabbits and draw. It was my first studio. I called it "Rabbit Warren". I kept my collection of cloak-and-dagger novels and comics. My first drawings were in fact "comic strips" made after those I had read. By a miracle, one of them has been preserved to the present day.

In Valjevo, I saw for the first time children playing together and doing pranks. I wished so much to be with them, to become a member of the gang and so, in a brawl, I almost lost my life. One of the local fellows broke my nose with his

heavy boot. Afterwards I was in a coma for a couple of days. Since there was no penicillin at that time, they cleaned my wound by pouring alcohol over it. I lost the sense of smell for the rest of my life. Who knows, perhaps owing to that my other senses are better developed?

After the liberation, the Germans left and communist leaders settled in the house instead of them. We were poorer than ever before. Father was hit by a kind of apathy and almost stopped working. He said he was tired of life and just sat there and smoked. I have vague memories of that period. I was dissatisfied with myself, scrawny, confused, insecure... Luckily, there was a man by my side who was able to pull me through. It was my uncle, my mother's brother. He had all the qualities, I thought unattainable: social status, he was a judge, he was attractive, cultured, elegant, well-built. He showed me some exercises that shaped the body and kept it in good form. Also, he insisted that I correct my left-handedness. Owing to those efforts, today, I write and paint with my right hand and the left one I use for wiping off the canvas what has to go off, or to throw stones, cut wood or hit, if necessary.

In the high-school that lasted eight years then, my talent for drawing was noticed. Professors asked me to make educational panels with specimen of flora and fauna, geographical maps with



papier-mâché reliefs and so on. When I was in the sixth or seventh year of the high-school, they proposed that I made posters for the local cinema, and offered a small remuneration. This filled me with self-confidence and pleasure. I finally had an opportunity to become independent from family home. Film became the centre of my interests, although I still read a lot. After Tito's separation from the Soviet Union the propaganda communist films were replaced by contemporary American and French cinematography. Since I spent all my free time in the cinema (when I did not help in the projection room, I drew posters in the adjoining chamber and chatted with friends), I saw most of the films for several times. I made the posters by copying cut-outs from the film tape onto the prepared canvas. As soon as one film would be taken off the programme, we would wash the paint from the canvas by spraying water from the hose and put a new background on it. In one of the posters I painted my first "erotic picture": a white triangle of the panties showed under the short skirt of the skater Sonja Henie. In order to transpose that chaste whiteness, I left the triangle covered only by the canvas background and no layer of paint. That very night, someone painted the triangle in black. I tried in vain to rub it off tomorrow, to clean it and add white paint – no matter how hard I worked I could not restore the

initial whiteness of untouched canvas. One should point out that the painting of the posters was in no way related to the painterly vocation. At best, I had gained some skill and my ambition went only so far to perfect that skill in order to get a permanent job as basic sustenance.

A. V.: *And because of that you enrolled the Academy of Applied Arts?*

Ljuba - The chances of my entering any studies in Belgrade were zero because of our financial situation. However, the director of the cinema for which I made the posters had a congenial idea – to place me in Belgrade as film selector and to pay me back for the work done by a kind of grant for the Applied Arts Academy. My art teacher from Valjevo, Bogdan Bakić, stepped in to help: he knew the rector of the Academy and sent me to him immediately with his letter of reference. Unfortunately, the enrolment period was over. I also learned then that the entry exam to the Academy was very difficult and the preparations took at least a year. So, I entered a kind of evening school of drawing in Šumatovačka Street (the equivalent of the Parisian *Grande Chaumière*). In order not to lose the entire year I enrolled Art History at the Faculty of Philosophy.

There were life drawing classes in the studio in Šumatovačka. It was then







that I saw for the first time a naked female body. It was a young Romany girl and her nakedness elicited in me the yet unknown sensations, but I forgot about them completely as soon as I concentrated on the drawing. The crucial moment in my life and in my, let me say, painterly career happened when my professor – they called him Petronije the Corpse because of his affection for still-lives – told me to fix the drawing I had made. All of those present gathered around me at once, stunned by the fact that The Corpse, of very few words, indirectly praised someone's work.

The next autumn, I passed the entry exam and became a student of the Academy of Applied Arts. Professors were excellent, but I was a little disappointed with the teaching methods. The reason for that was that at Šumatovačka I learned to draw after live models and to think like a painter, while the approach at the Academy was quite different. My friends from Šumatovačka, who had enrolled the Academy of Fine Arts continued to work and think like painters. I envied them and was very jealous.

A. V.: Then you were thrown out of the Academy of Applied Arts at the beginning of the fourth year, but without any perspective for the future. As a consequence, your parents lost the right to children's allowance, which helped them to make ends meet..

Ljuba - The real reason for this expulsion was a kind of misunderstanding with the management of the school, but I would not relate it at large. I would only like to point out that in that difficult moment Professor Marko Čelebonović (from the Academy of Fine Arts) helped me by carefully inspecting my works and talking to me as his equal. Finally, he sent me to the Secretary of the Academy and requested that I be admitted to his class, and directly to the fourth year. I owe so much to that exceptional man and pedagogue.

I remember telling him one day that I had problems to finish a painting. He suggested I should cover my picture with wrapping paper and leave in it just one aperture of about ten centimetres and concentrate on that part without thinking about the whole of the picture. In that way I learned that the pictorial space can be expanded and multiplied infinitely. I understood that each part of a painting must function by itself and that at the same time it must have a meaning in a broader context, in relation to the whole of the picture. I also understood that pictorial harmonies were dynamic categories, changing in relation to the distance from which a picture is observed. That a painting should be clean and finished in the artistic sense even when observed from a distance of five metres. Čelebonović also explained that the painter-



ly job must be approached seriously, in other words, that one should be in the studio every day, without any exception. I have always respected that ritual, even when I was on my holidays. During my entire life painting had absolute priority.

A. V.: Towards the end of your studies you met someone who had a decisive influence on your artistic development. Leonid Šejka, the founder of the Mediala movement, noticed your paintings at an exhibition and proposed that you joined the group of painters who had already been in the movement.

Ljuba - Leonid Šejka was a painter, an architect, art theorist, a philosopher ... and I felt an exceptional respect for him. I used to see him from time to time, but never ventured to approach him. He noticed my paintings at the annual students' exhibition, towards the end of my studies at the Academy of Fine Arts. His girlfriend, Olja Ivanjicki, also a painter and one of the founders of *Mediala*, told me about his positive appraisal of my works. She also arranged our meeting. The words Šejka said at that moment – “you are one of us” – had a profound influence on me. Not because I felt the need to belong to a group or a movement, but because the painters gathered around Šejka's charismatic personality were united in their view of painting and I shared their standpoint: the respect for the achievements of surrealism, reha-

bilitation of traditional values in painting, particularly those from the time of the Renaissance, rejection of the then dominant geometric abstraction and all the formal-aesthetic innovations that had arrived in its wake. I think one should define precisely some things: although my friendship with Šejka was true and very precious, I exhibited with the members of the *Mediala* only once. One should add that Šejka had full understanding for the aspects of my painting, particularly those that overly penetrated the area of eroticism and deconstruction. Apart from that, I had already begun to think about going to Paris. I had finished the first year of specialised course with Milo Milunović, who advised me to do my army service before definitely completing the studies. At the end of the second, and last year of the specialised course, I embarked on my Paris adventure, with five canvases rolled up as the only baggage and a one-way train ticket.

A. V.: And so, in the autumn of 1963 you left the country of your birth and entered the scene of Paris. Why did you make that choice?

Ljuba - The intellectual and artistic radiation of Paris was still very strong and, undoubtedly, had a permanent fascination over me during my schooling. I can still see myself leaving the train at Gare de Lyon holding five canvases from my



Belgrade period. Financially, the first years in Paris were very difficult. For some time I had to earn for living by painting apartments. But the letter of reference from my professor from the Academy, Marko Čelebonović, helped me to get into contact with Ginette, the daughter of Paul Signac, the painter. I even lived for some time in the servant's room she had let me. There with Ginette, in her luxury apartment on Quai de Béthune, I was introduced to the circle of artists and writers she liked to socialise with. And she arranged the meeting with René de Solier, and that was of crucial importance for me. The writer, art theorist and renowned art critic, de Solier was enchanted by my painting and enabled me to exhibit in the heart of Saint Germain, in the Gallery Diderot, managed by Armand Zerbib. In that way I met Matta, Max Ernst, Wilfredo Lam, Hans Bellmer, André Pieyre de Mandiargues, Jean Clarence Lambert and many others...

A. V.: *Although you were close then to the current avant-garde, you did not wish to join a group consisting, for example, of surrealists. Why?*

Ljuba - It is true that my work was the work of a recluse. I owe much to surrealism from the time I had seen the Urvater collection in Belgrade in 1958. However, I believe that Breton's move-

ment did not pay enough respect to the study of the purely visual qualities of painterly expression and the essence of painting. For that reason I had dilemmas about taking part in the exhibition "The Signs of Surrealist Renewal", organised by Patrick Waldberg in 1969. One should acknowledge today that, despite its grandiosity, surrealism belongs to the past.

A. V.: *Your works, just like the works that had left their mark on recent decades, belong to a kind of personal adventure following only the imperative of private searches. But that seclusion into a patient lonesome work is not only a consequence of the fact that avant-garde artistic movements had dissolved. It seems that the state of silent attraction, of concentrated watchfulness, is mostly an element of the process of creation. How does a painting really originate?*

Ljuba - Whenever I begin to work on a new picture, I ask myself the same question. If I knew the answer, I would probably stop painting. I could never envisage a painting in advance and then just transfer it to the canvas. What I paint is the result of a process evolving within myself and mostly incomprehensible to me...

What appears on the surface of a canvas – objects, figures, landscapes – they represent a kind of intimate infinity that torments me and that I cannot always



keep under control. A painting is composed and decomposed, inscribed on the canvas and erased. It develops in front of me and materialises. It is then that I decide what to keep and what has to be destroyed. Slowly, from one day to another, from one hour to another, the painting is taking shape in order to be legible to others as well. It is important that it contains the tension that makes up my dizziness as well. The sources of those anxieties are mystical, they arrive from the depths of nothingness and infinity, like some echoes of a tension which is not death. I study the shadow within myself, my inner flickers, quiet and dark pulsations. From time to time, in sleepless nights, I hear those pulsations, I feel a strange anxiety coming from distant regions, gathering around my muscles bringing headaches, perspiration, itching, dryness. I feel then the deafness of the time that slowly backs out and secretly leaves the studio. All of that is embodied on the canvas – and a certain spirit is emancipated from the picture, disturbing spirit... and also exciting. There is a moment in the work process when the picture “opens up”, when something yet unknown appears, something “never disclosed” and all of a sudden, the anxiety turns into something positive, a “divine gift”.

A. V.: *In a mysterious way your painterly activity permeates every moment of your*

life. How do you explain that overwhelming presence of the pictorial even outside the moment of creation?

Ljuba - In reality, I do not exist without my paintings. I have a feeling that in everyday life I do not exist but levitate. Very often I have to prove my own existence by touching and squeezing objects around me. It has happened to me, when something goes wrong with the picture I am working on, that I stay in the studio overnight in order to feel the vibrations, to experience them and record into my notebook their effect on me... It seems sometimes that I live the life of a mystic! What surprises me when I watch my creations from the first paintings onwards, is their strange uniformity. A world has evolved and it was not me who controlled the evolution. Different periods are differentiated only subsequently. For example, from 1982 to 1990, an acid green is dominant and afterwards, to my great surprise, a metal blue has sneaked into my work.

A. V.: *...as Bacon would say “I control one, but do not hope for another”.*

Ljuba - Yes.

A. V.: *It seems that the issue of technique is equally important for you as the representation of an unusual world that inhabits your canvases...*



Ljuba - I cannot agree with those who appraise my painting only for the surrealist or fantastic iconography they think to have recognised in it. What is represented in a painting – and what the eye of a superficial observer imminently catches – is unimportant in relation to the painterly work in real sense. The true task of a painter is to harmonise feelings. Painting is not a representation but a symphonic modulation of visual sensations. That painterly tonality is linked to the state in which I am at the moment of painting: a painting is a surface that reflects the tiniest variations of my thoughts and feelings in a given moment. The construction of its space – the architectural study of the verticals and horizontals – it is there only to calm the baroque play that floods the canvas. When I work I see first the dissonances that have to be harmonised, the chords that have to be accentuated... And when a picture rings in symphonic harmony, then I know it has been finished. Only when everything has been completed the observer has the feeling to have discovered in the work a fantastic or surrealistic subject matter, but I do not work in that spirit at all. The greatest danger for a painting is to become a representation of something, to lose all its pictorial power and to be only an illustration or a story ... The real subject of my painting is only painting.

A. V.: *Your works appear to be an original*

attempt to overcome the confrontation of abstraction and figuration. What is, in that sense, your relationship towards tradition?

Ljuba - Whether we like it or not, we belong to a certain history... in my case, to the history stretching from the Renaissance masters to the present, modern times. There would not have been Ljuba without the twentieth century art. However, the current painterly view is rather upsetting: we are not yet in a blind alley but we certainly are in a wide junk-yard and we should free ourselves from it by all means. I work with that perspective: to create something I call integral painting. In other words, the painting that uses all the possibilities in order to confront the essential questions, those that Gauguin fought in his pictures: Who are we? Where do we come from? Where are we going? The achievements of the twentieth century painting cannot be denied, but they are dispersed: With Tàpies, for example, we find extraordinary matter, with Hartung exceptional gesture, surprising bravery with Mathieu, excellent geometry with Vasarely, fascinating colours with Poliakoff, hallucinatory structures with Viera da Silva. But all those are separate, scattered innovations... there is no unity. In order for the painting to find again a universal depth it would be necessary to connect all those individual experiences and restore the need for spirituality.



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A. V.: Could you precisely define the meaning you attribute to "integral painting"?

Ljuba - One could not call integral painting something that is a simple pleasure for the eye: it should also include the issue of the being in its depth and complexity. Let me ask about the status of man in the world and his tragic destiny, the mystery that eroticism and fear of death confront us with. Seemingly our time has solved all problems, and overcome all the difficulties by means of its achievements in technology. But these subjects will remain and will torment humanity even more in the centuries to come.

Anyway, literature and philosophy have never stopped posing those questions – take, for example, Greek tragedians, Plato, Dante, Shakespeare, Poe, Nietzsche... Although painting treats those problems in a different way, with its own means and it emits a tangle of sensations more than messages... The principle of my searches is the existence of a community of sensations that move the core of our being, a unity of dark forces trembling within us. And the main goal of the entire engagement is to extract from the shadow all those internal

vibrations that frighten or excite us.

At this point we come to the heart of creation: an artwork is in harmony with cosmic forces. It does not represent cosmic forces, but it makes them visible. In my case, the goal would be to leave a legible trace about those hardly visible forces that constantly permeate us.

A. V.: Seen in that light, your pictorial space contains a certain organic dimension implying that you are in fact taking off a skin in order to reveal what is hidden below it – the skin that is not just the skin of a body but the skin of the world. As if the brush uncovers below the veil of illusion the untameable movements of a secret life, an intimate structure of the matter...

Ljuba - It is strange what you have just said: one day Lacan told me the same. The skin of a picture has a specific nature that cannot be found anywhere except on that background. It is a subtle and unstable link between the painting canvas and the traces of the brush and paint, laid one over another. The picture should open up through that surface and suggest a cosmic depth. Painting possesses in itself the power of revelation.





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The dome, 1964
Oil on canvas, 150 × 130 cm



Slavica Batos

..... A CHRONOLOGICAL OUTLINE*

Early childhood

1934–1940

Ljubomir Popović, known in art circles as Ljuba, was born on 14 October 1934 in Tuzla (Kingdom of Yugoslavia) in the family of Spasenija, a clergyman's daughter, and Aleksa, a well-off merchant, who owned land with an inn and a shop by the road connecting Tuzla and Zvornik. A few days before Ljuba's birth, King Aleksandar of Yugoslavia was assassinated in Marseilles. Ljuba was used to saying that his advent had been marked by the black flags of mourning and that his mother, traumatized by the events, had had an exceptionally hard delivery. He particularly highlighted the fact that he had been born 'upside down'. It was the desire of the woman who had assisted during the delivery that the boy be named Ljubomir, and his parents responded to her desire in gratitude, instead of naming him after his paternal

grandfather, as demanded by the Serbian tradition.

Ljuba was a beloved child, but reticent and fearful. His earliest memories were associated with Steva, a father's domestic worker, who hunt crayfish for him in the nearby brook, as well as with the scary accounts of hajduks told by his father's barber, and the grave in the garden where his parents' deceased baby had been buried. An event associ-

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Ljuba in his mothers' arms, Tuzla, 1935

*The text relies on the following sources: Anne Tronche, *Ljuba*, Paris: Albin Michel, 1988; Sarane Alexandrian, *Ljuba*, Paris: Éditions Cercle d'Art, 2003; *Day's Temperature*, notebooks containing Ljuba Popović's personal notes, Popović/Batos archive; tape recordings of the conversations with Ljuba Popović, 2009, Slavica Batos's personal archive; transcripts of tape-recorded conversations with Ljuba Popović, 1998, Alain Vuillot.



ated with the first issue of the children's magazine *Politikin zabavnik* also left a strong imprint in his memory. His father, Aleksa, was a subscriber to the daily *Politika*, which was delivered by the driver of a Belgrade–Tuzla bus, i.e. thrown out of the bus window, while still driving. One day, a children's magazine with colour images landed just in front of Ljuba. At that very moment, a path to a whole new universe opened – a universe that Ljuba would never want to leave.

School years in Valjevo

1941–1952

On the eve of World War II, the family moved to Valjevo (Serbia), escaping the extermination of the Serbian population by pro-Nazi and pro-independence Muslims in Bosnia. Many of Ljuba's maternal relatives were killed and all traces of their existence (houses, graves, documents, etc.) were erased.

During the German occupation, Ljuba completed the four-year primary school. Classes were held in an improvised classroom, in a tavern. German officers requisitioned the cosy urban home of the Popović family, leaving to the owners only one room and a kitchen. The family would never enjoy the comfort of their home because once the Germans had left, the house was immediately requisitioned by communist dignitaries.

This period of his life was marked by playing with mates and interest in sports, especially football which was particularly important for him, as well as by his first explorations into the world of adventure novels and the earliest hints of his drawing talent. Ljuba spent almost all of his free time in Zečinjak (Rabbit Warren). This small shed was used for meat drying by Aleksa Popović, whereas for his son this was a place where he tended rabbits and withdrew to read and draw. At that

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Ljuba (left) in the company of his little cousin, Tuzla, 1938–1939





Secondary school football team, with Ljuba standing first to the left, Valjevo, 1951

time, Ljuba made his first drawings in the form of comics inspired by the nov-

els he was reading.

As a grammar-school pupil, Ljuba Popović distinguished himself in writing and painting. He won the first prize at a film criticism contest, leaving behind Živojin Pavlović, who would become a film director and Ljuba's close friend. His first paid assignments were designs for large-format advertising posters for a cinema in Valjevo. At the same time, he started working as an assistant film operator in the projection booth. This is how he developed a passionate love for film, which would persist until the end of his life.



Ljuba's earliest drawings: the comic *A Lady Thief*, Valjevo, between 1945 and 1950

Belgrade, Academy of Applied Arts

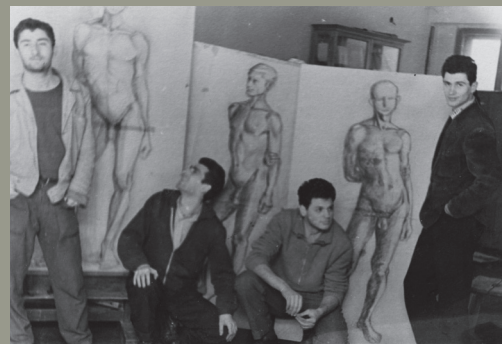
1953–1957

Having completed the secondary school as an excellent pupil, Ljuba had to cope with the fact that it would be impossible for him to continue his education at the University of Belgrade. Except for a public allowance, his family had practically no means: his father, Aleksa, who had lost his fortune during the war, became downhearted and inert, devoid of any business initiative. The small amounts of money that Ljuba occasionally managed to earn made little difference to this situation.

Quite unexpectedly, the director of the *Sindikata* Cinema, Voja Glušac, came to the idea to dispatch Ljuba to Belgrade as a film selector and agent working for cinemas in Valjevo for a modest salary. At the same time, he was to study at the Academy of Applied Arts and acquire training in decorative painting. The idea was supported by his grammar-school art teacher, Bogdan Bakić, who recommended him to the Rector of the Academy, Branko Šotra. Despite a warm welcome, Ljuba left the Rector's office disappointed, as entrance exams had already been finished. To avoid missing the academic year, he enrolled in the Art History course and undertook a drawing course at the art school



Ljuba during the first year of his studies at the Academy of Applied Arts, 1954–1955



Ljuba and his fellow students (Miki, Rudić, Martinović) in front of life-size studies, Belgrade, 1957



The works done during the studies at the Academy of Applied Arts, 1955

in Šumatovačka Street. At the faculty library, he discovered the colour reproductions of the great masters, whereas at the art school, he practised drawing after a live model, realizing the reality of a nude human body. He made close friends among some fellow students who would later become students of the Academy of Fine Arts.

Having successfully passed the entrance exam, Ljuba enrolled in the Academy of Applied Arts in the autumn of 1954. Initially, he attentively followed the instructions of his professors but as the time passed, it was becoming increasingly difficult for him to cope with academic drawing and painting rules. Understanding the form and rendering it on paper with mathematical accuracy were not in line with the painter's calling emerging in him. He desired to reach beyond the manifest appearance and filter through his own sensibility that what was throbbing behind it. Following the practice of his colleagues from the Academy of Fine Arts, Ljuba suggested to his fellow students to un-



Ljuba in front of the Academy of Applied Arts, 1956

dertake life-size nude studies and oil painting. The professors were becoming less tolerant to his peculiar individualism but Ljuba, who had already been inextricably immersed in his artistic calling and stubborn in nature, was not ready to make a slightest compromise. The breaking point was reached at the beginning of the fourth year of studies, when he was officially required to leave the Academy. A shadow of gloomy days was lingering over him.

The years at the Academy of Applied Arts were marked by the budding friendship with the future film director and writer Živojin Pavlović, who would also abandon the studies at the Academy of Applied Arts, pursuing his true calling.



Belgrade, Academy of Fine Arts

1957–1959

Following the expulsion from the Academy of Applied Arts, a second chance smiled upon him in his career as a painter. Professor Ivan Tabaković, who appreciated his work and did not agree with the decision, recommended Ljuba to his colleague from the Academy of Fine Arts, Professor Marko Čelebonović. Ljuba was accepted in Čelebonović's class, as a student of the fourth year. This exceptional pedagogue supported Ljuba in the pursuit of his own artistic expression, restricting his interventions to occasional friendly advice.

At that time, Ljuba had already had a fairly good place for work, which he had found a year before and which he had refurbished with the help of his fellow students Nikola Rudić and Miša Marti-nović. That was a spacious hexagonal dome nestled on top of a multi-storey building in Zagrebačka Street, overlooking the Sava River and opening to the sky. Through five upright vertical windows, the beams of yellowish light interspersed the darkness in the studio, creating a curious interplay of shadows. Many paintings made between 1957 and 1959 bear in their titles the reminiscence of the studio: *Phantoms of the*



The Dome, Ljuba Popović's first studio, Belgrade, 1968

Attic (1958), *Attic Nude* (1958), *The Green Image of the Attic* (1959), etc. The paintings of this period are dominated by the human figure, often effaced, motionless and confined in an airless space filled with clueless apprehension. His palette ranged between yellow ochre and burnt umber, with occasional hints of red and green shades.

At the student exhibition that traditionally closed each academic year, Ljuba's paintings captured the attention of Leonid Šejka, the founder of the Mediala art group and the creator of its theoretical framework. Šejka's idea of a synthesis between the Renaissance tradition and modern thought had already earned him the status of a paragon in



The interior of the *Dome* and the paintings *A Banker and His Wife* (in front of the painter), *Pssst* (left), *Flowering* (right), 1962

Ljuba's eyes and Ljuba was all the more honoured when this charismatic figure, unrivalled in the artistic circles of the time, promptly told him: "You are one of us". The following year, Ljuba exhibited two paintings at Mediala's third exhibition, held at the *Grafički kolektiv* gallery. Their friendship, which germinated at that time, fuelled by a strong initiation element, would end abruptly in 1970, with the death of Leonid Šejka.

The presentation of the Urvater collection in 1959 was the first exhibition of

Surrealist art in Belgrade. For the first time, Ljuba was able to see the original works of Salvador Dali, Giorgio de Chirico, Rene Magritte, Paul Delvaux, Max Ernst, etc. He was greatly impressed by the originality and quality of individual paintings but he could not find a single shared feature between the Surrealist doctrine and his own artistic impulses. A surrealist overtone can only be found in the personal writings from his youth, which he usually referred to as *Temperatura dana* (*Day's temperature*).



Military service and graduation

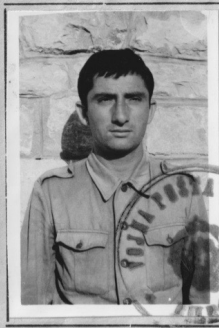
1959–1962

Having completed the fifth, i.e. the final year of studies at the Academy of Fine Arts, Ljuba decided to undertake additional training for two more years at a 'Master's Studio'. He joined the studio of Professor Milo Milunović, although he was concerned regarding the possible influence of this allegedly authoritarian figure on his work. Despite his reputation of an uncompromising man, Milunović was supportive of Ljuba's deeply personal artistic impulses, limiting his input to technical advice. Due to this, Ljuba could freely enrich his pictorial idiom with new forms, verging between the figural and the abstract, the organic and the mineral, the structured and the amorphous. The paintings representative of this period are *Isabelle* and *A Banker and His Wife*.

At the beginning of the first academic year, Ljuba made a short trip to Paris, accompanied by several fellow students, seeking to visit the Louvre, to walk along the banks of the Seine and the steep alleys of Montmartre, and to meet Dado Đurić, his mate who had left Belgrade three years earlier. Dado's intriguing personality had made an impression on Ljuba even before they first met. Once he saw Dado's paintings ex-

— 3 —

I. OPŠTI PODACI



2) Lični opis:

a) Stas: SREDNJI

b) Kosa: KESTENJASTA

c) Lice: OKRUGLO

d) Oči: KESTENJASTE

e) Nos: PRAVILAN

f) Usta: PRAVILNA

g) Osobeni znaci: NEMA

3) Ime:

POPOVIĆ
(porodično)

ALERŠA
(očevo rodeno)

LJUBOMIR
(rodeno)

4) Svojeručni potpis

A page from Ljuba Popović's Military ID card, 1 October 1960

hibited in a renowned gallery in Paris – the Daniel Cordier Gallery, the seed of hope that one day he would attain a similar success was planted in his heart.

Following the advice of Professor Milunović, Ljuba interrupted the special course after the first year to complete his military service. He was appointed to an artillery unit in Bileća, a small town in the former Socialist Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. His sport experience made it rather easy for him to cope with the military training. He also worked as a radio opera-



Ljuba Popović and Miro Glavurtić, one of the founders of Mediala, in 1966, during the filming of *The Return* by Živojin Pavlović

tor, practised drawing and even managed to complete several paintings that he would take to Belgrade, such as *Valediction to the Sublimated Residue*, *Cultivating Metal Boxes*, and *Jon Ihtem*.

In the autumn of 1961, Ljuba returned to Belgrade to resume the course with Milo Milunović. The return to the Dome, to his unfinished paintings and to his in-

ner self, stirred in him perplexing apprehension and discomfort, which could be appeased only through absorbing work. Having radically reworked the original concept, he finished the painting *Saint Sebastian*. Only a monochromatic overtone, a distinctive mark of all his paintings since 1957, was retained. The large-scale painting *The Pilgrims of Emmaus* marked the climax of his predilection for burnt umber. Shortly thereafter, peculiar pink-reddish shades would appear, accompanied with unsettled, almost abstract shapes. The departure from the familiar iconographic elements and the rejection of the classical methods of representation was also the departure from the doctrine of the Mediala group. From that moment on, Ljuba's painting would not conform to any theoretical system. He recognized the same state of mind in Dušan Makić, a young filmmaker, with whom he became friends and even took part in the making of his first film *Parade*.

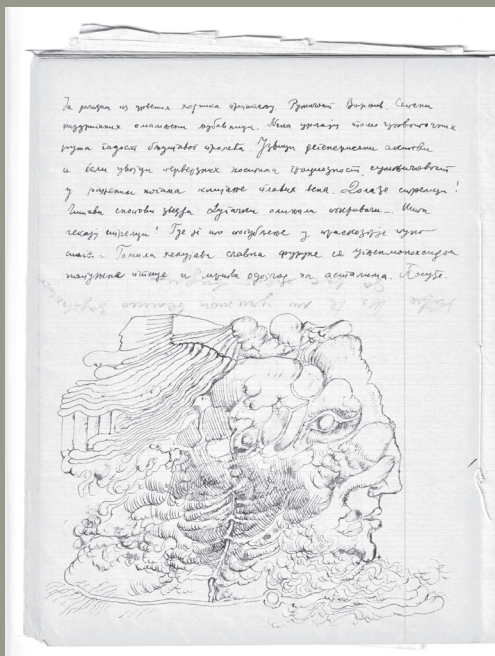


Settling down in Paris and the first exhibition

1963–1964

During the seven years of study, Ljuba was focused on work and withdrawn into his own world. Having left the Academy, he felt lost. The future was vague. At the same time, there was a growing desire to expand his horizons beyond his current artistic expression. In October 1963, he arrived in Paris, hoping to make a living and settle there for good. He brought only five rolled canvases: *Danaë*, *Flowering*,

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A page from Ljuba's notebook with personal notes, March 1964

Isabelle, *Istihon*, *Beauty Salon*. A friend found a room, "tiny as grave", for him in a shabby hotel in the Passage des Abbesses. Thanks to a letter from Marko Čelebonović, who recommended Ljuba to Ginette Signac, the daughter of the painter Paul Signac, he made his first contacts with the Parisian artistic community. During an opening ceremony at the Creusevault Gallery, Ginette Signac presented him to René de Solier, art historian and critic, who would be the first to take an interest in Ljuba's work and strive to build his reputation. De Solier introduced Ljuba to Marcel Zerbib, the owner of the Diderot Gallery, on Boulevard Saint-Germain, who purchased the five canvases brought from Belgrade and decided to provide Ljuba with a monthly income in return for new paintings. The difficult period when Ljuba had been forced to work as a house painter to survive would soon be behind him. Yet, he still did not have a studio. He was drawing sitting on his bed, with his sketchbook placed on his knees. For a time, Ginette Signac lent him a maid's room in her building on the Ile Saint-Louis, where he started working on his first painting in Paris – *The Multiplication of the Bizarre*.

Thanks to the support of his new friends, he was allowed to use the studio of the American artist Ruth Francken, who left for Germany for two years. The studio was located in 11 Rue Lepic,

and was spacious, well-heated and profusely lit through a large roof window. In this new space, Ljuba threw himself into work with all his vigour. His first exhibition in Paris was organized already in May 1964. It took place at the Edouard Smith Gallery, owned by Marcel Zerbib's brother Armand. The instigator of this exhibition was René de Solier. His name, printed on the invitation card, attracted a large audience to the opening ceremony, which extended beyond midnight. Along with the paintings from the Belgrade period, the audience could see the paintings made over the previous months, in Paris: *Little Prince*, *The Multiplication of the Bizarre*, *The Garden of Delights*, *The Doors of Paradise...*

The paintings from the Paris period were marked by a more complex and elaborate structure. Perspectives were multiplied, whereas shapes oscillated between compactness and diffusion in the pictorial fabric. The domination of warm hues was soothed with the subdued shades of green and yellow and, less commonly, with intensive ice blue hues. Once his paintings were publicly displayed, Ljuba began to meet painters, writers and art critics, such as Patrick Waldberg, an authority on and the advocate of Surrealism, and Jacques



Ljuba Popović and Nataša Jančić during a visit to Dado Đurić at Hérouval, 1975

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Kerмоal, a writer and journalist at Paris Match. The following year, Kerмоal wrote a remarkable article dedicated to Ljuba's work.

During 1964, Ljuba also took part in three group exhibitions in Yugoslavia, including the *Fantasy in the Works of Modern Belgrade Artists*, at the Cabinet of Prints of the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts in Zagreb. The introductory study for the catalogue was penned by Aleksa Čelebonović.

A significant change was taking place Ljuba's private life. He developed a close relationship with the architect Nataša Jančić, whom he had met during winter holidays on the mountain of Kopaonik already in 1955. They married in 1969 and had two daughters: Adriana (b. 1970) and Tiana (b. 1978).



Studio at Charenton

1965.

In February 1965, Ruth Francken unexpectedly decided to return to Paris, due to which Ljuba was forced to find a new place to work. A friend of Nataša suggested him to move into an affordable two-bedroom apartment that she had previously used at Charenton, a quiet little commune on the outskirts of Paris. Far away from the circle of friends who had been constantly present in his daily life for almost two years, he fully dedicated himself to painting. The football matches played with his Spanish neighbours were the only distraction.

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Early in 1965, Ljuba's attention was fully absorbed by the large-scale painting that would later be known as *Requiem*. The formal and aesthetic, as well as chromatic innovations introduced in this painting led to a feeling of discomfort, so strong that he had to remove the canvas from his studio and leave it with a friend, the painter Bata Mihajlović. This is a good illustration of Ljuba's perplexing relationship with his works. The painting *Herania*, from the same period, was easier to cope with. Its title was inspired by the heroine of the science fiction novel *Out of the Silence* by the Australian writer Earl Cox. Ljuba would later say that for him the painting was "like a dream of love and immortality". At the same time, he completed

the painting *God of Illusion*, started the previous year, and undertook to paint the *Last Supper*, reinterpreting the composition borrowed from Leonardo da Vinci's painting. The same year, he painted about fifteen smaller paintings, where he could give free



Ljuba in his studio at Charenton standing in front of the *Last Supper*, 1965



rein to his inspiration both in thematic and technical terms. For example, the background was rendered in tempera or gouache, while sophisticated forms were rendered in oil paint.



Ljuba with his painting *Sorcerer*, dedicated to René de Solier, 1966

Montparnasse

1966.

In 1966, Ljuba left the studio at Charonton to settle, together with Nataša, in an apartment in the centre of Paris, at Montparnasse. The apartment also served as his studio. However, everyday life could not be reconciled with his creative work: he felt that it hindered his work as a painter, which had always been vital to him. Few paintings were painted in this period, but surprisingly, their visual power remained intact. He started painting *Ljiljana or the Milky Way*, parallelly with a bizarre painting named *Balthazar*. According to Ljuba, its title had nothing to do with the name that the members of Mediala gave to a Belgrade vagabond with the intention of fashioning him as a symbol of free life.

Severely disheartened, Ljuba also had doubts about the meaning of painting. Once again, he felt the urge to seek answers in a dialogue with the Great Masters. Accompanied by his friend Arsić, Ljuba undertook a trip to Ghent to see the polyptych *The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb* by Jan van Eyck. A few months later, a visit to the National Gallery in London would leave him with an unforgettable memory: *Ambassadors* by Hans Holbein. A reproduction of this painting, with the famous anamorphosis of the skull, a symbol of the in-



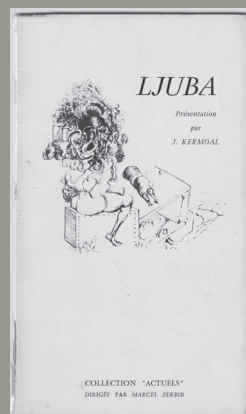
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Ljuba at the balcony of the apartment at Montparnasse with the painting *Coupling*, 1966

terconnectedness between the occult sciences and art, would for long adorn a wall in his studio.

Marcel Zerbib organized another solo exhibition of Ljuba Popović, this time in his own galleries, first at Saint Germain-des-Près and a month later in Brussels. A modest booklet was published on this occasion. It contained an introductory essay by Jacques Kermoal, who wrote: "Knowing Ljuba is like entering straight into a world of fantasy where nothing is imaginary except our limited imagination [...] If this world is sometimes absurd, this is only so because our way of seeing it is absurd."



Studio in the Odessa Passage

1967.

Ljuba finally found a studio that perfectly suited him. In fact, it was a dilapidated and dirty attic and it took him much effort to turn it into a place suitable for work. He was attracted by its size and a glazed roof transmitting cool light. The atmosphere in this part of Montparnasse was significantly different from that in the residential areas where he had previously lived and worked. The Odessa Passage was a meeting point of bohemians and young actors, especially after the establishment of the *Lucernaire*, a theatre in a cafe.

After a period of diminished activity, Ljuba was so overwhelmed with the creative energy that he started working on several paintings at the same time. One of them was *Isabelle, a Few Years Later*, which undoubtedly bore a refer-

ence to the painting *Isabelle*, made during his studies with Milo Milunović. This painting, like many others, deals with the fragility of the human body but it also reveals the resilience of Ljuba's pictorial idiom.

The cover of the booklet published on the occasion of Ljuba's second exhibition in Paris, 1966



The first large-scale paintings

1968.

Throughout the year, Ljuba was fully dedicated to work. In his new studio, bright and spacious, he was fully absorbed with the work on the paintings started the year before, and some new ones. The huge painting *The Angel of the Wickedness or the Awakening of Small Boxes* (195x250 cm), later exhibited at the *Salon de Mai* in Paris and purchased by the National Centre for Contemporary Art (CNAC), stood out among them. The painting exuded vigorous sensuality. Rounded and soft weightless forms surrounded the central female figure suggesting that the same original magma begot the entire organic world.

In May, Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* premiered in cinemas. Captivated by this masterpiece



Ljuba with the painting *Isabelle, a Few Years Later*, 1967

During 1967, he took part in several official public exhibitions in Paris, Antibes, Montrouge and Belgrade. The Rive Gauche gallery, managed by R. A. Augustinci, presented Ljuba's paintings and prints alongside the works of Max Ernst, Dorothea Tanning, Henri Michaud, Wilfredo Lam, etc. at an exhibition entitled *22 peintres d'une figuration autre* (*22 Painters of a Different Figuration*).

Ljuba with the painting *Susanna's Education* in his studio in the Odessa Passage, 1967





of the seventh art, Ljuba drafted, on a three-metre long canvas, the rough outlines of the painting that would later be known as *Divination or Homage to Arthur Clarke and Stanley Kubrick*.

In April 1968, he took part in the exhibition *De l'imagination (On Imagination)*, organized by R. A. Augustinci at the Rive Gauche gallery in Paris.

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Ljuba in front of the staircase leading to his studio, Paris, ca. 1970



Studio in the Odessa Passage; the photo was made during the filming of the television show *Culture Today*, dedicated to Mediala: Vladimir Veličković (second to the left), Ljuba Milin (fourth to the left), Ljuba Popović (first to the right) in front of the painting *The Divination or Homage to Arthur Clarke and Stanley Kubrick*, Paris 1968

A house on the island of Vrnik

1969.

Just like every year, Ljuba stayed in Yugoslavia during the summer months. He met his old friends in Valjevo, whereas in Belgrade, he spent hours discussing painting with Leonid Šejka. With the first hot days, he moved to the Adriatic coast. The barren vegetation and the blue sky helped him to relax, to “purge his mind”. On the island of Vrnik, near Korčula, Ljuba and Nataša bought an abandoned stone house that had once served as a stonecutter’s workshop. After it had been thoroughly renovated and expanded, the house became a meeting place for many Ljuba’s friends from Yugoslavia and France. They included René de Solier and his wife Renée Miesse; Anne Tronche and the writer Philippe Curval; the writer André Pieyre de Mandiargues and his wife, the painter Bona de Mandiargues; the publisher Georges Fall; the publisher and the founder of the *Quadrum* journal, Jacques Goldsmith; Gordon Sacks and Ruth Hofmann, the editors of an American book on Ljuba’s art, etc. In an interview, Ljuba said: “In my life, Vrnik has had a special flavour and it will always stir pleasant memories.”

In Paris, Ljuba regularly met René de Solier. It was still difficult for him to speak





French, but the two men did not really need words to understand and respect one another. René de Solier introduced him to Georges Lambrichs, a novelist and the editor of a book series at Gallimard.

The painting *Divination* was finished and exhibited at the *Salon du Mai* in Paris. At the same time, Ljuba was working on several large-scale paintings: *Annabella or the Thirst for Evil*, *Hibernation*, *Question of Hysterical Objects*, *A Lesson in Alchemy*, *City of Bitten Men*, *Sleepwalker...*

In September, the National Museum in Valjevo organized an exhibition of Ljuba's works covering the period between 1957 and 1963. In November, he took part in the exhibition *Signes d'un renouveau surréaliste (Signs of a Surrealist Revival)*, organized by Patrick Waldberg at the Isy Brachot Gallery in Brussels. Ljuba would later tell to a friend that he had been reserved about the exhibition because deep in his heart he had not considered himself a surrealist artist.



House on the island of Vrnik, 1973

Raša Golubović, Boško Milosavljević and Ljuba, during the exhibition at the National Museum in Valjevo, 1969





New friends, the birth of the first daughter, and father's death

1970.

In the spring, Ljuba took part in another exhibition organized by Patrick Waldberg, entitled *Résonances sur-réalistes (Surrealist Resonances)*. In the introductory essay for the catalogue, Waldberg wrote: "It is not insignificant that Ljuba, through his art, has made us aware again of the sacred nature of this world of terror."

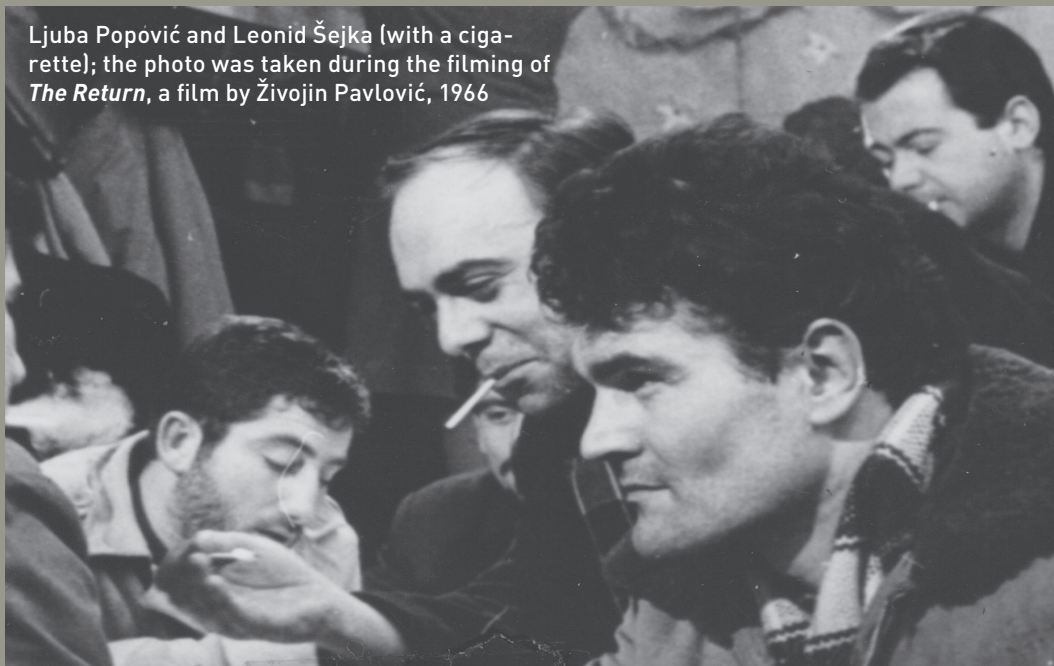
Ljuba finished the paintings *Question of Eternity* and *Hibernation*. He parallelly worked on a large-scale painting *Creation of Androids*, marked by complex chromatic harmonies. Anne Tronche, one of the greatest experts on Ljuba's

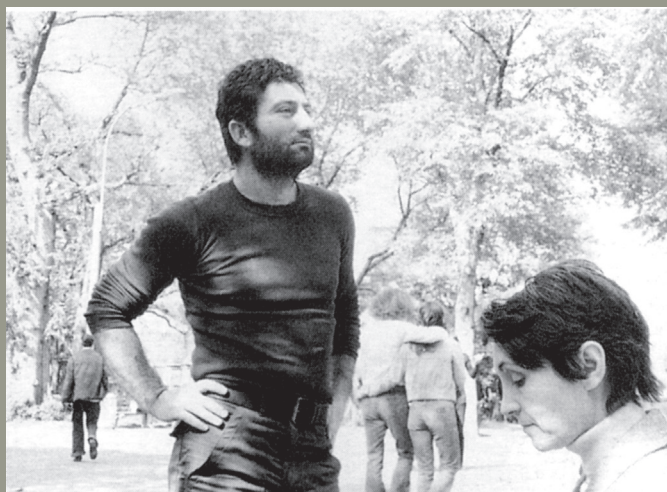
work, would later say: "colour has here become syntax. It unites or brings together the distinct elements of the composition". He also painted *Gloria*. Placed in the middle of the scene, an evanescent and milky feminine apparition infuses with its soft light a multitude of elongated and crystalline elements.

Ljuba was introduced to Alain Jouffroy, who was running, together with Jean-Clarence Lambert, *Opus International*, a magazine supporting the artistic expression of young artists. In 1970, the editorial board was preparing a special issue dedicated to Yugoslavia. On this occasion, Jouffroy wrote an article in which he reunited Dado Đurić and Ljuba Popović under the title *De Dado-la-guerre à Ljuba-la-peace (From Dado-the-War to Ljuba-the-Peace)*.

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Ljuba Popović and Leonid Šejka (with a cigarette); the photo was taken during the filming of *The Return*, a film by Živojin Pavlović, 1966





Ljuba and Thessa Herold at Central Park, New York, 1974

During the summer, Ljuba made a short trip to Florence which, for personal reasons, left a painful memory in his heart. He noted down: "Even today, when I think of Florence, the memory betrays me and I fail to evoke a convincing image. I see a golden city as distant from my personal universe as another planet."

His first daughter, Adriana, was born in May. In the autumn, he met Thessa Herold, who had set up her gallery a few months before. Their long and fruitful collaboration started soon thereafter and it would end with Ljuba's death, forty-six years later.

Ljuba's father, Aleksa Popović, died in September. In December, Ljuba had to face the death of his valued and exceptional friend Leonid Šejka.

The first monograph on Ljuba's art

1971.

The series of 'cosmic paintings', anticipated the previous year in *The Creation of Androids* and the rough outlines of *The Birth of the Cosmic Man*, started to develop. Fuelled by the same inspiration, Ljuba painted *Beyond the Star-gate* and *The Infinity Ladder*. He gradually abandoned indoor scenes, showing one or two figures in a confined space, in favour of spacious and lush scenes. His pictorial idiom was becoming softer, more flexible and increasingly fluid. Impregnated with light and energy, shapes were relieved of their material weight, as evidenced by *A Room in Florence*, a painting infused with an intimate atmosphere and moving sensibility.

In October, the Isy Brachot Gallery in Brussels organized a solo exhibition of Ljuba's paintings, where thirty-six canvases done between 1967 and 1970 were displayed. The introductory essay for the catalogue was authored by René de Solier. As a fervent supporter of Ljuba's work, he also wrote an extensive text that would soon be published as a book. This was the first monograph in French dedicated to Ljuba's work and also the first monograph dedicated to a Yugoslav painter published in France. It was released in December by Georg-





es Fall as part of the series *Musée de Poche*. On this occasion, Thessa Herold put on display in her gallery (Galerie de Seine) Ljuba's four large-scale paintings. They captured the attention of the art historian and theorist Anne Tronche, who openly expressed her enthusiasm. A few years later, upon the instigation of Thessa and Jacques Herold, Anne Tronche would write a remarkable text about Ljuba's art for the monograph edited by Gordon Sacks and published in New York.

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The rich art collector and writer Jean Davray discovered Ljuba's work and he would soon become a loyal purchaser of his paintings and patron of his art. Thanks to his financial support, the ranking of Ljuba's paintings on the art market was significantly improved.

The Ambassador of Yugoslavia to France, Ivo Vejvoda, organized a reception at his residence in Paris and Ljuba Popović was invited as a guest, along



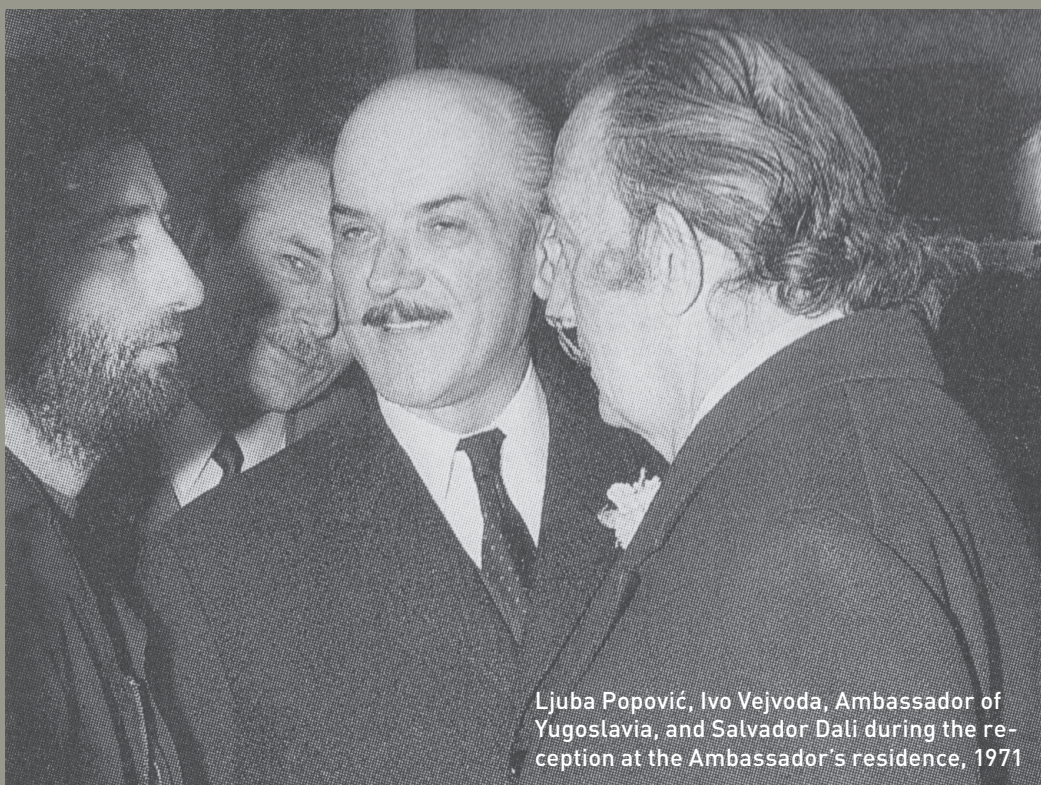
The cover of the first monograph on Ljuba's art published in French

with Salvador Dali. On this occasion, the two painters discussed their respective experiences regarding the use of colours.



Exhibition in Brussels: Jacques Goldsmith, Nataša Jančić, René de Solier, 1971





Ljuba Popović, Ivo Vejevoda, Ambassador of Yugoslavia, and Salvador Dalí during the reception at the Ambassador's residence, 1971

A burst of eroticism

1972.

A burst of eroticism is the distinguishing mark of the paintings done in 1972. Women's bodies with distinct sex characteristics dominate the paintings such as *Venus and Death*, *Sabra or Homage to Mrs. Robin*, *The City of Lost People* and others. Nevertheless, Ljuba persistently denied any figurative intention and any narrative that could potentially accompany it. Purely formal and aesthetic explorations remained the focus of his creative pursuits.

As he would say in an interview, twenty years later, the only real subject of his painting had always been painting itself.

Upon recommendation from René de Solier, André Pieyre de Mandiargues visited Ljuba's studio in February 1972. A peculiar friendship sparked immediately between the surrealist writer and the painter.

In May and June, Ljuba's twenty-three large-scale paintings, made between 1970 and 1972, were exhibited at the Galerie de Seine. The introductory essay in the catalogue was penned by André Pieyre de Mandiargues and René Etiem-



ble. Mandiargues wrote: "In addition to the division into mind- and hand-driven artists, distinction can also be made between the painters driven by a warm hand and those driven by a cold hand, which is in this case exemplified by the opposition between the painters driven by a warm hand and those driven by a cold hand, which is in this case exemplified by the opposition between Ljuba and Dali, whose ice cold skill has nothing in common with the ardour that pervades Ljuba's paintings."

Through Count Guy de Lahoussaye Ljuba met the American gallerist Julien Aberbach, who would organize an exhibition of his works two years later.

In 1972, Ljuba took part in several group exhibitions in Paris, Brussels and Skopje.

While staying in Valjevo during the summer, Ljuba met Slavica Batos, a young secondary school graduate and a future architecture student. Ten-odd years later they would start living together in Paris. Their son was born in 1989; according to Serbian tradition, he was named after his paternal grandfather, Aleksa Popović.

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Ljuba and André Pieyre de Mandiargues, 1980





Ljuba Popović and Slavica Batos,
photo taken by Vican Vicanović
in his studio, 1977

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Artistic mastery

1973.

Ljuba, who truly lived only through painting, continued to unveil the agitating impulses under the surface of his consciousness by exploring the pictorial fabric. The space in his paintings bent, multiple visions permeated each other, shapes conformed to various visual perspectives. This is especially evident in the painting *Florence, or The Birth of Melancholy*, which he undertook to paint in 1972, to finish it the following year, as well as *The Sunset or the Lilith Complex*, which showed a similar shifted perspective. In the most important painting of this period, entitled *Prayer or The Key to the Universe*, it was obvious that the calculated distortions of the perspective

went hand in hand with a perfect artistic mastery.

The exhibition *Collection fantôme (The Ghost Collection)* was organized at the Galerie de Seine with the idea of demonstrating the lasting vitality of Surrealist painting, until 1973. Philippe Soupault, one of the founders of the movement along with André Breton, was responsible for the selection of paintings and the introductory essay in the exhibition catalogue. Ljuba's painting *Lot and a Lotus* was displayed along with the works of Brauner, Camacho, Dominguez, Ernst, Klee, Tanguy, Miro, Picabia, etc.

In 1973, he took part in group exhibitions in Paris, Brussels, Belgrade and presented his work in several Italian cities within the exhibition *Surréalisme encore et toujours (Surrealism, Again and Always)*, organized by Patrick Waldberg.



New York

1974.

Upon instigation of Thessa Herold, Alain Bosquet, a French prose writer and poet of Russian origin, wrote a text for the monograph on Ljuba's work published by *Editions de la Connaissance*, a publisher based in Brussels. This was the first monograph in a series aiming to draw attention to the artists who had gained prominence after 1945. The series editor was Jacques Goldsmith, the founder of the journal *Quadrum*. A book signing was held at the Galerie de Seine, where eight paintings were put on display for the occasion.

The same paintings, accompanied with another ten canvases, were displayed at the Aberbach Fine Arts Gal-

lery in New York in September. Despite the radical contrast between Ljuba's pictorial idiom and the aesthetic trends of the time, the exhibition was unquestionably successful. The audience's reception of his large-format paintings, including *The Temporal Body*, *Studio*, *Day and Night*, was spontaneous. The introductory essays for the catalogue were written by the American historian of Modern art Sam Hunter and René de Solier. Unlike previous catalogues, this one contained Ljuba's comments on the displayed paintings, excerpted from his diaries. He stayed in New York for several weeks, sightseeing and visiting art galleries and museums. He had no desire to paint, leaving the studio rented for him by Aberbach desperately empty.

In November, shortly after his return to Paris, he was painfully struck by the death of René de Solier.

Late in 1974, Ljuba was granted the French citizenship.



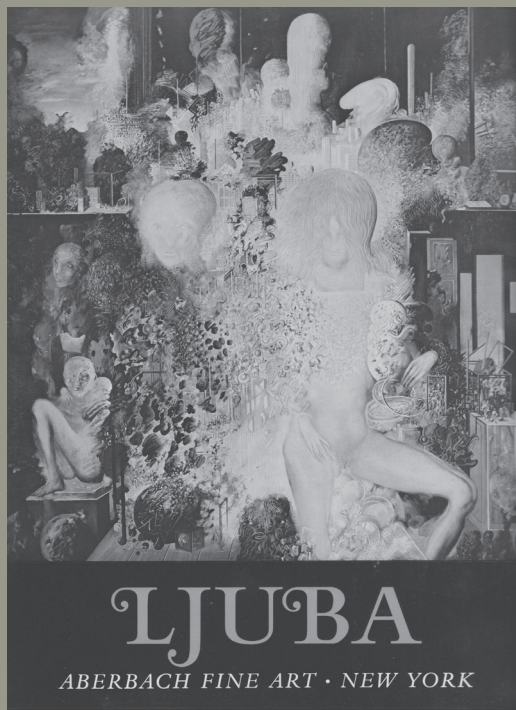
Ljuba working on the painting *Prayer or The Key to the Universe*, 1973



The last days in the studio in the Odessa Passage

1975.

Once the modernization of the Montparnasse train station and the construction of the business tower reaching more than 200 metres in height had been completed, the Odessa Passage was destined for demolition. Ljuba was forced to leave his studio but the very thought of it stirred in him severe anxiety. Although the paintings from this period are scarce, his creative power



Cover of the exhibition catalogue, New York, 1974

Ljuba Popović and Alain Bosquet at the book signing in New York, 1974



remained intact. Ljuba worked on two large paintings: *Reincarnation* (dedicated to René de Solier) and *Cosmic Consciousness*, where architectural landmarks were blurred, giving way to less structured, evasive spaces. It was also possible to observe the emergence of tumultuous stormy skies in his paintings. He also outlined the layout of the *The Beauty of the Day* and *Lady Tamer and the Ghosts*. The curious painting entitled *Repulsion (K.E.C.)* reveals a fusion between personal memories and the ghosts originating from a deeper ancestral memory.

Michel Lancelot made a film about Ljuba's art for French television as part of the series *Les peintres de notre temps (The Painters of Our Time)*. During the filming, Ljuba began painting *The Beauty of the Devil* right in front of the camera. At the same time, Petar Nedeljković made a film about Ljuba's art for the Belgrade television.



A photo taken during a visit to Dado Đurić in Hérouval; left to right: Ljuba, Michel Random, film director; Pierre Belfond, publisher; Jacques Herold, painter; and Dado, 1975

A limited large-format edition containing Ljuba's seven original prints accompanied with Jean-Clarence Lambert's essay *Les plaisirs difficiles* (Difficult pleasures) was published by Pierre Belfond, as part of the prestigious series *Les cahiers du regard*.

Anne Tronche undertook to write a book covering Ljuba's entire oeuvre as a painter.

Ljuba met Jean-Louis Ferrier, a professor at the National School of Decorative Arts and an art critic. The psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan visited Ljuba's studio.



Ljuba and Anne Tronche on Vrnik, at the time when they were preparing the monograph, 1976



Anamorphoses and a homage to Goya

1976.

In February, Ljuba saw the exhibition *Anamorphoses* at the Museum of Decorative Arts in Paris. Since the Renaissance, this kind of painting, which could be roughly described as the reflection of an object in a curved mirror, had questioned the relationship of the appearance and the reality. Inspired by the exhibition, Ljuba painted *Scream*, demonstrating that even in modern times a painter could be interested in such eccentricities.

Accompanied by his friends, Ljuba made his first trip to Spain. He visited Barcelona, Cadaques, Valencia, Madrid and the Prado Museum and was strongly impressed by Goya's painting *Saint Francis Borgia Helping a Dying Impenitent*. Once back in Paris, he painted *Spring (Homage to Goya)*, imprinting on his memory an erotic dimension.

At the Galerie de Seine, he exhibited his drawings and ink wash paintings and the catalogue for the exhibition presented his writings, excerpted from his personal notes – *Day's Temperature*.

Together with Botero, Dado, Chavez, Veličković and Cremonini, Ljuba presented his works at the exhibition *Les espaces insolites (Unusual Spaces)*, organized in Strasbourg by the poet and art critic Jean-Dominique Rey.

During the summer, André Pieyre de Mandiargues stayed for a whole month on Vrnik. In a relaxed and friendly atmosphere, he finally had enough time to socialize and talk with Ljuba. Upon returning from vacation, Mandiargues wrote a poem in prose *Ode to Ljuba*, evoking his impressions of Vrnik. The poem was published in the literary magazine *La Nouvelle Revue Française* in 1977.

Ljuba moved to a new studio, in Val de Grâce Street, where he completed *The Beauty of the Day* and *Lady Tamer*.

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Ljuba in front of the painting *Spring (Homage to Goya)*, 1976



Ljuba in his new studio in Val de Grâce Street, 1976



Painting a triptych and a trip to Israel

1977.

Ljuba worked on several large-scale paintings for an exhibition at the Beaubourg Gallery scheduled for the following year. He finished *Earth (Moly)* and *Fallen Angel* and started painting *Paradise Lost*, which would later become known as *Desire II*. His personal notes record the emergence of blue and purple hues, “icy and soft as a death shroud”. He also started working on a huge painting (260 x 400 cm) which, once completed, would become *Homage to Sir James George Frazer*.

During a trip to Israel, Ljuba visited Mount Sinai and the monastery of Saint Catherine. He was impressed by the shades of the Sinai desert “ranging from red to cool pink and grey”.

Philippe Prince made a film about Ljuba for French television. The film was entitled *Metamorphoses*. Alain Bosquet’s text served as a poetic thread linking the paintings. The film has never been released because of a dispute between Bosquet and Éditions Gallimard over copyright.

Ljuba in front of the paintings *Homage to Sir James George Frazer* and *Debauchery (Homage to Laocoon)*, which would later become part of the same triptych, 1977

Love-Monster

1978.

In February Ljuba exhibited eleven large-scale paintings at the Beaubourg Gallery, held by Pierre and Marianne Nahon. The introductory text for the catalogue was penned by Anne Tronche. The very sight of all the exhibited works made Ljuba feel uncomfortable for “the degree of self-disclosure” in the paintings.

On the eve of summer, Ljuba exhibited twenty-five large-scale paintings at the Veranneman Foundation, in a free-standing building near Kruishoutem in Belgium. The introductory essay for the catalogue was written by Alain Bosquet. For the same occasion, Ljuba painted two series of small paintings: *Ten Little Nightmares* and *The Caves of the Unconscious*.

He made acquaintance of Anatole Dau-





Ljuba and Jean-Louis Ferrier

man, the founder and president of the production company *Argos Films*. Upon Daurman's suggestion, the filmmaker Walerian Borowczyk directed a fifteen-minute film *Love-Monster*. During the filming Ljuba began painting *Werewolf* and *Spring*.

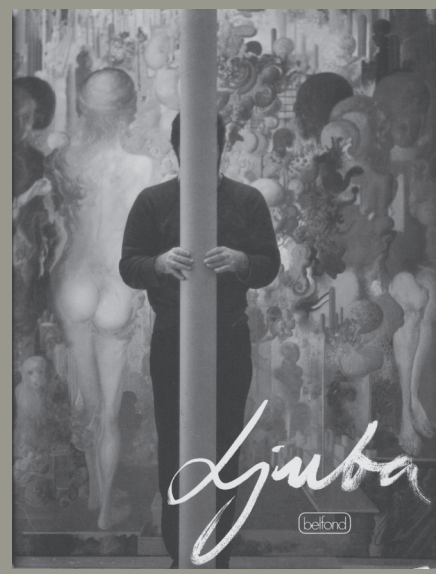
Svemir Pavić made the film *Ljuba o sebi (Ljuba on Himself)*. Some sequences were captured during the opening of the exhibition at the Beaubourg Gallery, whereas the others were filmed on Vrnik during the summer.

Pierre Belfond's publishing house released a monograph on Ljuba's work. It contained essays written by twelve authors. Jean-Louis Ferrier was the editor.

Towards the end of the year, Jurgis Baltrušaitis's book *The Mirror* was released. Although well familiar with Baltrušaitis's studies on anamorphoses, Ljuba was this time struck by the coincidence between the content of the book and his own ten-

dencies to fragment space and create parallel universes in which illusion and reality mingled. In the years to follow, he would create several 'mirror paintings'.

In May, Ljuba's second daughter, Tiana, was born.



The cover of the monograph *Ljuba*, published by Pierre Belfond, 1978





One triptych replaced with another

1979.

The three large-scale paintings originally intended to form the triptych entitled *Paradise Lost* were separated and their roads definitely parted. From that moment on they would be known as *Desire I*, *Desire II* and *Desire III*. On the other hand, three other paintings, having been partially repainted, were united into the triptych *Homage to Sir James George Frazer*. The triptych was intended for the main hall of the Sava Congress Centre in Belgrade. Once it reached Belgrade, they were partly altered to form a coherent whole.

Ljuba painted *The Abyss for the Body*, *Night Woman* and the diptych *Mirror I* and *Mirror II*.



Ljuba Popović and Walerian Borowczyk during the filming of *Love-Monster*, 1977.

At the International Modern Art Fair (Foire Internationale de l'Art Contemporain – FIAC), held at the Grand Palais, the Galerie de Seine dedicated its entire presentation area to Ljuba's paintings. Six recent large paintings were displayed, including *The Kiss of Death*, dedicated to the gallerist Alexandre Braumüller, who had committed sui-

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Ljuba's paintings in the Galerie de Seine's presentation booth at the FIAC, 1979



cide by throwing himself into the Seine. Braumüller had introduced Ljuba to his friend Jean Davray, who would enrich his art collection with many Ljuba's paintings.

Michel Lancelot organized the exhibition *Le Musée Volé (The Stolen Museum)* at the galleries Isy Brachot and Galerie de Seine, in Paris. Ljuba's paintings *Iceberg* and *Double Nostalgia* were presented along with the works of Botero, Camacho, De Chirico, Dado Đurić, Delvaux, Magritte, etc.

Walerian Borowczyk's film *Love-Monster* was presented in Parisian cinemas as a supporting film screened before Volker Schlöndorff's *The Tin Drum*.

The art and architecture magazine *Cimaise* published an article about Ljuba, written by Anne Tronche and accompanied with several reproductions. The magazine *Zoom* presented Isaure de Saint Pierre's interview with Ljuba, accompanied with colour reproductions. The magazine *Opus International* also dedicated several pages to Ljuba. The article was written by Henri-Alexis Baatsch.

Ljuba's mother, Spasenija Popović, died in February.

Ice blue

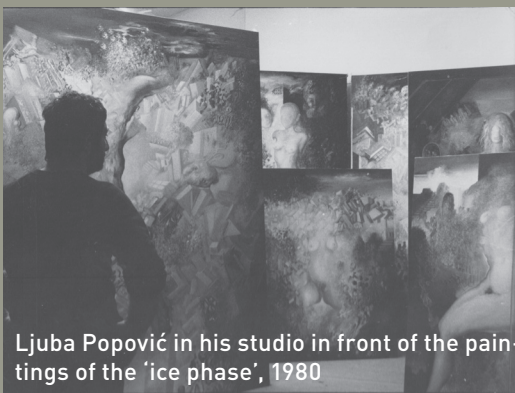
1980.

Ljuba made three paintings pervaded by a new ice blue overtone: *Ice Age*, *Three Points*, and *The Mountain of Desire*. He believed that they had sprouted from a cool blue square that had first appeared in *The Abyss for the Body*, painted the year before. "Ice crystals" also emerged in the *Crucifiction*, the painting that had already troubled him though he had just started working on it. To render the tension of the crucified body, in the early stages of work, the canvas was placed horizontally and Ljuba used images of hysterical convulsions as inspiration.

He also took part in an ambitious exhibition organized in New York by Pierre Cardin – *European Trends in Modern Art: One Hundred Paintings*, covering the period between 1950 and 1980. The author



The exhibition organized by Pierre Cardin: Nataša Jančić, Anne Tronche and Ljuba, New York, 1981



Ljuba Popović in his studio in front of the paintings of the 'ice phase', 1980

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of the exhibition was the writer and art critic André Parinaud. Ljuba exhibited *The Games of Love and Death*, done in 1970–1971, owned by Jean Davray, and several paintings from Galerie de Seine's collection.

Ljuba Popović and Jean-Marie Drot during the filming of the TV show for French television, 1981



Crucifixion

1981.

Ljuba completed one of his most important paintings – the *Crucifixion*. This is how he referred to it in his notes: “This picture is peace and torment, the pain of the purple precipices, the hysterical tension of the man, and the blue shards of my most beautiful illusions”.

Early in 1981, an exhibition of watercolours and ink wash paintings was organized at the Isy Brachot Gallery in Paris. The catalogue included a preface by Michel Lancelot and Ljuba's text about watercolour. In Pérouges, in southern France, Ljuba presented twenty-seven paintings of various sizes done between 1976 and 1981. The same exhibition was presented once again, in October, at the Pierre Cardin Evolution Gallery in New York.

Gordon Sacks, a New York-based publisher, released an extensive monograph about Ljuba's art in English. The project was initiated and financially supported by Thessa Herold, whereas the text was written by Anne Tronche. The monograph included a *catalogue raisonné* of all Ljuba's works.

The May issue of the magazine *Vogue-homme* featured an article dedicated to Ljuba, written by Isaure de Saint Pierre and accompanied with photographs by Alberto dell Orto. The June issue of the





Photo session for *Vogue* at the studio in Val de Grâce Street, 1981

German magazine *Die Kunst* brought an article about Ljuba, penned by Gustav René Hocke; it was illustrated with seven full-colour reproductions. The same article was later included in the book *Malerwelt ab 1900*. The Yugoslav literary magazine *Gradac* dedicates a double issue (42–43) to Ljuba’s art. The texts were written by various authors and illustrated with black-and-white reproductions.

The writer and documentary filmmaker Jean-Marie Drot made a one-

hour TV show about Ljuba, as part of the series *L’art et les hommes (Art and Men)*. The film was shot in Paris, on Vrnik and in the Morača Monastery.

In the eight-volume *Encyclopédie de la sexualité (Encyclopaedia of Sexuality)*, five pages were dedicated to Ljuba: a text by Isaure de Saint Pierre was accompanied with five reproductions.

In 1981, Ljuba began a collaboration with the Belgrade gallerist Čedomir Edrenić.



From *The Island of Death* to *Ecstasy*

1982.

Ljuba completed the paintings begun the previous year, *Love Cages I* and *Love Cages II*, in which he continued to explore the duplication of space and transparent or reflective surfaces. The painting with a gloomy island in its upper section, originally conceived as homage to Böcklin, was transformed into a picture of unbridled eroticism – *Ecstasy*.

The painting *Night Woman*, begun in 1979, which had undergone several radical changes, was purchased by André Serval and exhibited at the Grand Palais as part of the exhibition *Le cabinet d'un collectionneur (The Cabinet of an Art Collector)*.

In October and November, the Marion Meyer Gallery presented a mini retrospective exhibition of Ljuba's drawings, watercolours and paintings done between 1958 and 1982.

After twelve years, the Galerie de Seine ceased its activities. Hired by L'Oréal, Thessa Herold became the manager of the Artcurial Gallery.



Ljuba in his studio in Val de Grâce Street, 1982

The first huge landscape

1983.

Ljuba finished three large vertical paintings (195×160 cm), started in 1982. After much hesitation, he decided to call them *Sodomy and Gomorrah*, *The Secret of Memory* and *Temptress*. Initially, the last painting was to be reshaped into an elongated trapezoidal format, according to the desire of André Serval, who had commissioned it. While working on it, Ljuba decided to keep the initial, rectangular format and to cancel the commission. He also finished a curious painting showing a bisexual character, started during the previous summer on Vrnik, and named it *Saturn's Dual Face*.

Ljuba painted *Choking (Hara-Kiri or Homage to Mishima)*. The “cold and metallic” hues in this painting surprised and bewildered him. He also started painting his first large-scale landscape, “long-awaited and desired”, with a female nude occupying the lower half of the painting. The body would shortly be covered with a multitude of small objects (rocks, fruits, flowers) and the painting would become *Burial Place*.

In August, the Belgrade gallerist Čedomir Edrenić organized an exhibition displaying ten watercolours and ink wash paintings done between 1980 and 1983 from his own collection. The exhibition took place at the Modern Gallery



Installation of *Burial Place* in the lobby of a company in southern France, 1986



in Budva, Montenegro.

Ljuba was introduced to Etienne Chaton, a heritage conservation specialist working in Fribourg in Switzerland. Chaton commissioned him to design a stained-glass window for the church of Saint Peter Carignan, near Fribourg. The stained glass image was to feature the Crucifixion.

Ljuba began writing articles on art for the Belgrade weekly *NIN*. He signed them as V. Pop-Ljubojević.



“Man Will never Be God”

1984.

A major solo exhibition was organized at the Veranneman Foundation, Belgium. The paintings done between 1979 and 1984 were brought together in three hexagonal rooms. The introductory essay for the catalogue was written by Isaure de Saint-Pierre. She wrote: “Nothing is static in Ljuba’s painting, but whether the movement reaches out to heaven or to hell, it is impossible to say. Likewise, he does not celebrate love happiness or creative self-satisfaction, but the dizzying love of someone who suffers for not possessing the beloved body, who laments over the differences that blemish the beings. Man will never be God. He is condemned to rebuilding his hell and choosing tumults and fury.”

The distinctly erotic painting *Byzantine Ring*, done in 1984, was presented at the collective exhibition *Art, or et bijoux (Art, Gold and Jewellery)* at the Vendôme in Paris.

Through Jean-Louis Ferrier, Ljuba met Jurgis Baltrušaitis, who visited his studio. Baltrušaitis would include in the new edition of his book *Anamorphoses* Ljuba’s three paintings: *Ingrid*, *Scream* and *Landscape*, as well as a short excerpt from the *Day’s Temperature*.

Ljuba in his studio, standing next to his design for a stained-glass window for the church of Saint Peter Carignan near Fribourg, 1983



Water, forests, flying monsters

1985.

The painting *Burial Place*, which took almost three years of work and reflection, was finally completed. A new painting, *Lioness* was completed fairly quickly. It shows a female nude, bent like a bridge over a large stretch of water. Since 1985, water increasingly pervaded Ljuba's paintings. This is particularly evident in the painting *Adam's First Step*, where human figures are tiny, giving the space an impression of immensity. The same proportions may be observed in the large oneiric composition *The Prisoner of Fribourg*. This painting anticipated fantastic structures, springs, caves, mists and flying monsters to appear in later works.

In November, Ljuba travelled to Yugoslavia to attend the inauguration of the Valjevo Modern Gallery, founded upon instigation of Slobodan Đukić, Dušan Mihajlović and Ljuba Popović. An exhibition dedicated to Ljuba, covering the period be-

Ljuba Popović
and Emil
Veranneman,
Kruishoutem,
1984

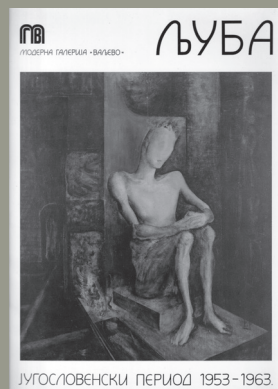


fore his departure for Paris, marked the beginning of the Gallery's activities.



LJUBA

Catalogue of the exhibition at the Veraneman Foundation with the painting *Ecstasy*, 1984



Catalogue de l'exposition
à Valjevo, 1985

Groupe d'amis devant la
Galerie Moderne, Valjevo. De haut en bas :
Đorđe Bukilica, Slobodan Golubović Lemán, di-
recteur de la galerie Dragutin Radojčić, Danica
Đukić, Dušan Mihajlović, Slobodan Đukić, Ljuba
Popović, Miki Manojlović, Slavica Batos, Iskra
Manojlović, Živojin Pavlović, 1986.



Tenderness and sensuality

1986.

The large-format painting *Temptations*, started the previous year, was completed. It was marked by a contrast between a delicate female figure and an atmosphere tainted with threats. Ljuba continued to paint landscapes showing vast water surfaces, mist and waterfalls. The female bodies embodied tenderness and sensuality. The most important paintings from this period include: *Under the Sign of the Serpent*, *Study of Tenderness*, *Waterfall*, *The Cool Water of the Doomed Castle*, *Disintegration in Time*, etc.

A major solo exhibition was organized at the Richter & Masset Gallery in



The first two pages of the article published in *Penthouse*, *Sodomy and Gomorrah* and *Anxiety over the Grand Source*, 1986

Munich. The introductory essay for the catalogue was penned by Gustave René Hocke.

In November, the *Penthouse* magazine published sixteen reproductions of Ljuba's paintings, accompanied with Isaure de Saint-Pierre's text *Black Romanticism*.

Jean Davray's collection was offered on auction at Hôtel Drouot in Paris. Michel Poux, who would become a great collector of Ljuba's works, purchased *The Birth of the Cosmic Man*.

Separated from his first wife, Ljuba started living together with Slavica Batos. Late in December 1986, he travelled to Amsterdam.





The Children of Hell

1987.

Ljuba continued his explorations into fantastic landscapes, which sometimes featured a female body in the foreground. He was perplexed over the rough outlines of a large horizontal painting, perceived by him as “a new chromatic outcry”. The painting, completed as late as 1990, would bear the title *The Scream of a Pink Body*. Ljuba also undertook to paint a large landscape commissioned by Anatole Dauman but he was soon overcome by the feeling of repeating something already seen. In the middle of the scene, he placed a black angel, believing that Dauman would not like the painting, especially because it was named *The Children of*

Hell. Nevertheless, Dauman purchased it; the painting would remain in his dining room until his death in 1998. Other major paintings from this period include: *Under the Sign of the Cross*, *Fire in a Pavilion of Love* (one of the few paintings in which blue is not dominant) and *Purification*. The unusual format of the last work (138 × 190 cm) is explained by the fact that it was painted on an old frame belonging to a painting done in 1959, which had been removed from it and sent to the Valjevo Modern Gallery.

The March–April–May issue of the magazine *Cimaise* brought a twenty-page essay on Ljuba’s art penned by Jean-Louis Ferrier under the title *Vers le troisième millénaire (Towards the Third Millennium)*. The text was accompanied with twenty reproductions, both black-and-white and full-colour, covering the period between 1978 and 1986.

The painting *Wound* was presented at the international exhibition *Surrealism*, at the Retretti Art Centre in Finland.

Ljuba visited Fribourg, where he completed the *Crucifixion* stained-glass window.



Ljuba Popović in his workshop in Val de Grâce Street, surrounded by the paintings *Temptations*, *Romanticism after Rain II*, *The Scream of a Pink Body* and *Nocturne*

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The fiction of the Crucifixion

1988.

The work on two large-scale paintings relying on an iconography that he had already mastered, started in December 1987, progressed rather smoothly. Once completed, they would be known as *The Labyrinth of the Apocalypse* and *Temptations Revisited*. Ljuba painted *Hysterical Landscape* as a recollection of the summer months spent on the beach *Plavi gusar (Blue Pirate)* on the island of Jakljan. The painting originally bore the title *Endangered Nature*. In the painting *Forgotten Guillotine*, which, according to him, evoked “the coldness and indifference of 18th-century landscapes”, he strove to “engender a rhythm, an inner movement, that would encourage viewers to read the painting as a book”.

The painting *The Return of Ulysses or The Wreck of an Idyllic Landscape* was presented at the collective exhibition *Méditerranée, sources et formes du XX^{ème} siècle (Mediterranea, Sources and Forms of the Twentieth Century)* held at the *Artcurial Gallery*, run by Thessa Herold.

The painting *Crucifixion* was displayed at the exhibition *La passion du Christ (The Passion of Christ)* at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Dunkirk. It was only



The cover of the French edition of the monograph *Ljuba*, 1988

then that Ljuba’s attention was drawn to the spelling error in the painting’s title, which endowed the *Crucifixion of Christ* with a science fiction overtone.

The publishers Albin Michel of Paris and Prosveta of Belgrade published the French and the Serbian versions of the monograph *Ljuba*, written by Anne Tronche and originally published by Gordon Sacks (Alpine Fine Arts) in New York in 1981

Ljuba working on *Crucifixion*, 1981





The studio on Jakljan, the son's birth

1989.

The series of paintings focusing on “water and bodies” was growing. Ljuba painted three canvases of the same format: *The Revelation of Truth or Concealed Lovers*, *The Return of a Person from the Past* and *Poisonous Evaporation*.

He described them as “paintings fusing tenderness and anxiety” or as “a romantic idyll threatened by palpating fear”. He laid the first brushstrokes on a huge canvas (240 × 310 cm), nailed to the wall because he was still reluctant to order a frame. The provisional title was *The White Light of Death*. According to his personal note,

the emerging painting represented “the tragedy of disappearance in a white light, devouring, immaterial and powerful”. Once the painting was completed in 1990, the title *The Enigma of Creation* was written on its back.

The writer Serge Fauchereau and Philippe Soupault organized the exhibition *Voyageur Magnétique (Magnetic*

Voyager) in Montreuil; it was accompanied with an extensive catalogue. The painting *Under the Sign of the Cross* was displayed.

Ljuba spent the whole June on the island of Jakljan, one of the Elaphite islands near Dubrovnik, where he signed an agreement with Milijan Vasić, the director of the tourist resort, regarding the construction of his art studio and its use for a ten-year period.



Ljuba standing in front of the uncompleted painting *The Enigma of Creation*, 1989

André Serval, one of the major collectors of Ljuba's works, died in summer 1989.

Ljuba's son, Aleksa, was born in July. On the eve of his birth, Ljuba completed the painting *The Revelation of Truth or Concealed Lovers*.

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The devil is in the detail

1990.

Ljuba brought to completion the large-format paintings started over the past two years: *The Scream of a Pink Body*, *The Enigma of Creation*, *Devil's Caves*, and *Transparency after the Body*.

Inspired by an idea put forward by Ljuba, Thessa Herold organized the exhibition *Belvédère Mandiargues (The Mandiargues Belvedere)* at the Artcurial Gallery to celebrate the 80th birthday of André Pieyre de Mandiargues. On this occasion, Ljuba displayed the paintings *Studio (1973–1974)* and *The Enigma of Creation*. José Pierre wrote the text for the catalogue.

From June to August, Ljuba stayed in his new studio on Jakljan, with Slavica and Aleksa. He noted down: "I found the balance of body and mind. If ever there was a period of happiness in my life it was during the summer of 1990 on Jakljan." During the summer, he worked on several paintings, including those for the FIAC, to be held in the autumn.

Late in October, at the FIAC, the publisher and gallery owner Michel Delorme reserved his whole exhibition area for Ljuba's paintings. Having seen his paintings under the intensive white light of the Grand Palais, Ljuba found some hues to be "crude and harsh" and decided to pay greater attention to "the enrichment of

the fabric" in the future, not neglecting the smallest detail. He was very satisfied with the painting *Devil's Caves*.

At the exhibition organized on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the Valjevo Modern Gallery, Ljuba presented two paintings from the Belgrade period and wrote a text for the exhibition catalogue.



The island of Jakljan in the Elaphite archipelago near Dubrovnik

Ljuba with the football player Dušan Savić, Jakljan, 1990



The Last Summer on the Adriatic Coast

1991.

Ljuba was elected an external member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts in Belgrade. He undertook to write a new series of articles on art for the Serbian weekly *NIN*, this time under his real name. The first article, entitled *Century's Misfortune* dealt with the exhibition of Théodore Géricault's works at the Grand Palais.

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Ljuba exhibited eighteen large-format paintings at the Gruyères Castle in Switzerland. The opening ceremony left him indifferent. He noted down: "People are not able to see, nobody is interested in painting." In Geneva, at the Art Bärtschi Compagnie Gallery, he exhibited his watercolours, ink wash paintings and drawings in ink.

A war broke out in Yugoslavia. The summer resort on Jakljan, which housed Ljuba's studio, was deserted. Ljuba, Slavica and Aleksa stayed alone on the island with a Croatian family, that of the resort's guardian. They took the last flight from Dubrovnik to Belgrade to return to Serbia.

In Paris, Ljuba painted a small painting entitled *My Walk after Death*. His silhouette, easily recognizable in the middle of the painting, is surrounded by a cloud of "white and dense light".

André Pieyre de Mandiargues died on 13 December. Ljuba was deeply affected by his death as he had lost both a great supporter and a valued friend.



Invitation for the exhibition at the Gruyères Castle, featuring a reproduction of the painting *The Secret of the Gruyères Castle, 1991*

Beauty and evil

1992.

This was a period marked by doubts and anxiety. As always, Ljuba sought refuge in his work. The work on the painting started towards the end of 1991, named *Nightmare*, proceeded slowly and perplexingly. "A woman's body in tension. A bridge between our underground passions and a landscape of death, with a sea and dark islands. A strange manifestation of beauty, evil, ugliness, chaos." On another canvas of the same format, the body is raised. Its face reflects astonishment. The final title of the first painting would be *Nightmare I, Homage to Füssli*, whereas the second would be called *Nightmare II, the Awakening*. He also painted *A Landscape with Volcanic*

Dust, "dedicated to a secret love". Upon starting to paint *The Big Picture of Evil*, he noted down: "I find the painting very beautiful. Yet, evil is present, I do not know where exactly."

Ljuba was one of the painters covered in the *Dictionnaire de l'art moderne et contemporain (Dictionary of Modern and Contemporary Art)*, published by the Editions Hazan; the entry was written by Jean-Clarence Lambert. Among other things, he wrote: "Ljuba has developed his own style, between fantasy and mannerism, dream and reality, the imaginary and the conceptual."

Having lost his studio on Jakljan, Ljuba stayed, for the first time, in the small Greek village of Xiropotami, near Mount Athos, where he painted *Athos, the Holy Mountain*. He stayed for two days in the monastery of Hilandar.

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Sun's Death

1993.

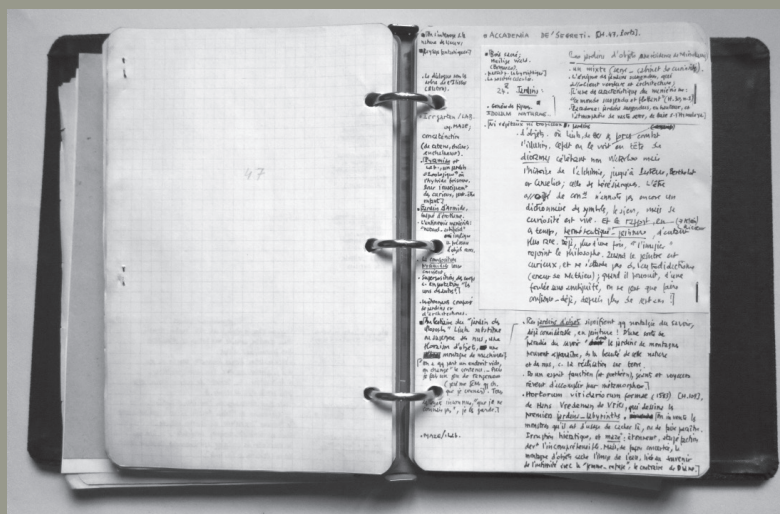
Faced with a tide of disturbing news reaching him from Yugoslavia, Ljuba painted *Sun's Death*, "as an anticipation of the explosion".

The Sombor-based publishing house *Zlatna grana* published a book dedicated to Ljuba. An unpublished text that René de Solier had written in 1971, and had given to Ljuba just before his death, was deciphered, typed and translated to be published in this book. It was accompanied with Ljuba's drawings. In the book *Le théâtre de l'âme (The Theatre of the Soul)*, Alain D. Valade dedicated the chapter *Ljuba ou la volonté de création (Ljuba or the Will to Creation)* to Ljuba's art.

After nine years at the Artcurial Gallery, Thessa Herold decided to establish a new gallery, this time at Marais, near the Picasso Museum. Along with Camacho, Matta, Mušić, Saura, Zao Wou-Ki, Ljuba was part of the inaugural exhibition *Au rendez-vous des amis (A Friends' Meeting)*. The introductory essay for the catalogue was written by Pierre Daix.

Invited by Jacques Mousseau, a former editor-in-chief of the magazine *Planet*, Ljuba stayed in Tataouine in Tunisia. The vacation in Xiropotami ended in a perilous journey through Macedonia and Kosovo to reach Buljarica (a seaside village in southern Montenegro). At the end of the summer, he stayed with the art collectors and friends Draško and Branka Milićević.

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The original manuscript of René de Solier's text published in the book by *Zlatna grana*, Sombor

Black romanticism

1994.

Ljuba completed the painting *Sun's Death* and embarked into the phase of "black romanticism" with three somewhat smaller paintings of the same format: *The Joy of a Non-Existent Space*, *Dead Peacock's Garden* (where black lightning revealed his desire to paint storms and disasters) and *Vanished World*.

In the spring, Ljuba's paintings were displayed at the exhibition *Hantises (Hauntings)*, organized by Guy Bärtschi, at his gallery in Geneva. The exhibition featured works by Bacon, Bellmer, Brauner, Matta, Saura, Veličković, etc. In the autumn, a solo exhibition was organized at Guy Bärtschi's gallery. The exhibition catalogue included an introductory essay and several poems by Jean-Clarence Lambert. The book *Symbolism* by Michael Gibson was published in four languages by Taschen. It contained a reproduction of Ljuba's painting *Temptations Revisited*.

In the issue dedicated to the craving for love, the literary



Ljuba with his children Tiana, Aleksa and Adriana, Xiropotami, 1994

journal *Poésie* published Ljuba's drawings and watercolours, accompanied with texts by Alain D. Valade, André Pieyre de Mandiargues (*Ode to Ljuba*) and Patrick Grainville.

Ljuba spent another summer in Xiropotami. He painted on canvas nailed on the wall or fastened to it with a strapping tape, in the room that served as a studio, living room and a kitchen.

Studio, winter 1994; paintings: *Temptations Revisited* (left), 1989; the sketch for *The City of Souls* (behind Ljuba), completed in 1997; and *The Island of Heads II* and *The Breath of Storm*, painted in Xiropotami (right)



The Abode of Ghosts

1995.

Ljuba continued the work on a very large horizontal painting, the title of which was beginning to take shape. In this stage, *The Abode of Ghosts* seemed to be a suitable title. Ljuba felt that the painting was beginning to “belong to him”, that he had managed “to creep into it, to inhabit it, to identify with it”. He also noted: “In the past, I would get rid of my torments by placing them on canvas. Today, I am looking for a refuge in my paintings, peace for the soul.” The diptych *Soko Grad* revealed a new, different light, which Ljuba described as “a battle between yellow light and white heat”.

In Paris, he took part in the exhibitions *Figuration – Configuration in Paris*, organized by Jean-Louis Ferrier at the



Ljuba and Sarane Alexandrian, late 1990s



Ljuba in his studio, Paris, 1995

Lavigne-Bastille Gallery, and *Figuration de l'imaginaire: du Réalisme fantastique à l'Art visionnaire (Figuration of the Imaginary: from Fantastic Realism to Visionary Art)* at the gallery of Franca and Pierre Belfond. In Belgrade, the Verica Art Gallery organized a collective exhibition displaying the paintings of Dado Đurić, Vladimir Veličković and Ljuba Popović. The essays in the catalogue were written by Živojin Pavlović and Branko Kukić.

Two documentary films dedicated to Ljuba were made by Ilja Slani and César Sunfeld.

Ljuba was introduced to Sarane Alexandrian, a writer and theorist of Surrealism. Several years later, Alexandrian would write the text for a major monograph about Ljuba's art published by *Cercle d'Art*.

The year was marked by health issues. Two surgeries resulted in exhaustion and depressing thoughts.

The naivety of times past

1996.

Five large-scale paintings done between 1972 and 1976 were exhibited at Thessa Herold's gallery. The catalogue included an introductory essay by Alain D. Valade and Ljuba's comments on each of the exhibited paintings. At the opening ceremony, Ljuba was astonished by "the naivety of the paintings and the steel determination in executing them". In October, he took part in the group exhibition *Black List* at Thessa Herold's booth at FIAC, where he displayed *Night Tales, Homage to E. T. A. Hoffmann*. The collective exhibition *Metaphysics – Still Life*, organized at the Valjevo Modern Gallery, was instigated by Ljuba. The introductory essay for the catalogue was written by Živojin Pavlović.

During the summer, in Greece, he painted several medium- and small-size paintings. Once back in Paris, he put the last touches to the *Garden of Love under Surveillance*, started on the island Jakljan in 1990, and completed *White Cloud*, *The Secret of the Pink Diamond* and *The Awakening of Demons*, while continuing the work on the large painting *The Death of a Maiden*, which was at that time filled with dark and threatening flying objects.



Ljuba with his daughter Adriana at FIAC in front of *Night Tales, Homage to E. T. A. Hoffmann*, Paris, 1996



The Death of a Maiden

1997.

Ljuba started painting a new large-format painting, where the central section was occupied with a woman's body, tormented and chained, immersed in a cloud of white-hot particles. Already at this stage, the creative process got stuck and could not progress. He placed the painting *The Death of a Maiden* next to it, "so that they help one another". *The Death of a Maiden* was then subject to a radical change: "the maiden with luxuriant yellow hair and wide-spread breasts" was concealed under a cloud of flying objects and creatures, killing and burying her, in a pictorial sense.

Ljuba parted, with regret, with the painting *Ishibor, Homage to Beliaiev*, which he considered his metaphysical self-portrait. Ishibor (or more precisely, Ichthyander) was the hero of one of the favourite science-fiction novels of his youth, *Amphibian Man* by the Russian writer Alexander Beliaev. Ljuba painted twelve small paintings under the common title *The Wanderings of a Shadow*, as well as several paintings for an exhibition at Thessa Herold's gallery, due in 1998. One of them was *Hindrance to Eternity*, a painting executed with cold perfection stirring in him a strange feeling, "as if it had been painted by someone else".

In Belgrade, the journal *Itaka* dedicated an entire issue (270 pages) to Ljuba's paintings and drawings.

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Ljuba's studio, Paris,
1997



Endgame

1998.

The year was marked by two major exhibitions. In Paris, Thessa Herold presented in her gallery twenty-four recent paintings, twelve of which were painted specifically for this exhibition. The introductory essay for the catalogue was penned by Alain Vuillot. In Belgium, at the Veranneman Foundation, two exhibition rooms were dedicated to Ljuba's work. In Belgrade, at the Verica Art Gallery, two large-format paintings, *Sun's Death* and *The Big Picture of Evil*, were displayed.

In the Greek village of Xiropotami, where he was spending his seventh summer, Ljuba rented a new house with a shed at the edge of the courtyard that served as a studio. He paint-

ed *Endgame (Beckett)*, showing "the joy of deliverance, the celebration of the abandonment of mundane materiality". In the autumn, he started working on the large-scale painting *Ghost Ships* and *Time Tombs*, relying on familiar iconographic elements: bodies, intensive light, skeletons, crumbling, dispersion, etc.

The Surrealist literary magazine *Supérieur inconnu* published an interview with Ljuba, made by Alain Vuillot, a young philosophy teacher. The interview was based on their conversations at Ljuba's studio.

The Valjevo Modern Gallery organized an exhibition of Čedomir Edrenić's collection. Ljuba's thirty-odd paintings were displayed alongside paintings by Šejka, Dado, Samurović and others.

Towards the end of the year, Ljuba lost one of his best friends, the Serbian filmmaker and writer Živojin Pavlović.

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Tombs for history

1999.

The work on *Time Tombs* was progressing well. At that time, Ljuba was reading *Hyperion*, a science fiction novel by Dan Simmons, and *The Mystery of the Cathedrals* by Fulcanelli. He discovered a "splendid correspondence" between the ideas of the famous alchemist and his own universe. He noted down that, thanks to Fulcanelli, he began to grasp the fundamental difference between Gothic and Renaissance art. In April, the painting *Time Tombs (Dan Simmons)* was completed and "commended to the history of the 20th century". Ljuba's text *Vers les cryptes du temps (Towards Time Tombs)* was published in the October-December 1999 issue of the journal *Supérieur inconnu*, dedicated to the *fin du siècle*. Ljuba's drawing was featured on the front cover of the issue.

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An exhibition of Ljuba's works on paper (small-scale paintings in oil on paper, watercolours and drawings) was held at the La Hune-Brener Gallery, in Paris.

The anthology of modern and contemporary art *L'aventure de l'art au XX^{ème} siècle (The Adventure of Art in the 20th Century)* by Jean-Louis Ferrier was published. It included a text dedicated to Ljuba's art – *Le monde fantastique de Ljuba (Ljuba's Fantastic World)*, and a reproduction of the painting *Venus and Death*.

The hotel chain Novotel commissioned a drawing that would later be reproduced in lithography, in sixty copies. In exchange, Ljuba was awarded with a free family trip to the Cape Verde Islands. In October, he travelled to Belgrade, where he saw, for the first time, the damage caused by the 1999 NATO bombing. In December, he travelled to the island of Reunion in the Indian Ocean, upon invitation from Jacques Mousseau.

Ljuba was introduced to Michel Poux, French industrialist and art lover, who would become his friend and a major collector of his paintings.



Ljuba on the island of Sal in Cape Verde, 1999





The Secret of the Red Door

2000.



Ljuba and Michel Poux at the airport, returning from the Seychelles, 2003

Ljuba completed the painting *Ghost Ships*, to which he gave an alternative Serbian title – *Tajna života posle smrti* (*The Secret of the Afterlife*). In the centre of the painting, he placed a skeleton, with a head similar to his own. This macabre self-portrait is surrounded by crumbling cathedrals, ghost ships, enchanted forests, a figure emerging from the underworld, a female musician playing on a femur bone, a beloved woman from the past, a crystalline hall... He believed that this was his first paint-

ing reaching out to him from the Other World. Another painting, *The Secret of the Red Door*, terrified him so much that he believed it had evil powers.

Ljuba took part in the exhibition *Phantastik am Ende der Zeit* (*Fantasy at the End of Time*) at Erlangen–Nürnberg University, Germany, and in the group exhibition *Un regard de Bernard Noël* (*A View of Bernard Noël*) at Franca and Pierre Belfond's gallery.

The literary journal *Phréatique* published on the cover of issue no. 93, dedicated to language and creation, a reproduction of the painting *Salome*. The issue included a text about Ljuba's art written by Raymond Beyeler.

Ljuba's friend and collector Jova Obradović died.

Ljuba in his studio, in front of the painting *Ghost Ships*, 2000



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Deliverance through paintings

2001.

Ljuba kept on changing two large paintings started in 1999. In one stage of the work, he saw them as *The Signs of Heaven*, whereas in the other, they were *Lolita of Light, Dante's Women, Lucifer's Kingdom... Who are the women emerging from darkness? – he wondered. Why do their bodies radiate light? Is this the glow of Hell?*

Ljuba was terrified over the rapid march of time and the decline of his earthly existence. He wondered: "Is my deliverance through paintings really ensured?"

He completed sixteen small paintings for the special, limited edition of a new monograph dedicated to him. The title *L'errance d'un esprit fatigué (The Wander-*

ing of an Exhausted Spirit) was identical to that of a painting done in his student years. It "sounded shocking" in 1959; in 2001, it "sounded logical".

He took part in the exhibition *Autour de la revue Supérieur Inconnu (The Circle of the Journal Supérieur Inconnu)*, held at the Visitation Chapel at Thonon-les-Bains (Haute-Savoie). Ljuba also designed a poster and the invitation card for the exhibition. The journal published the reproductions of *The Secret of the Red Door*, which was displayed at the exhibition, and *Endgame*. He also took part in a group exhibition at Franca and Pierre Belfond's gallery.

In February, Ljuba spent two weeks on the Cape Verde Islands. In Greece, he finally found a comfortable house with a studio, where he could isolate himself and work in peace.

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Ljuba in his new studio in Greece,
Xiropotami, 2001



A Dream of Flying

2002.

Ljuba put the final touches to the paintings started in 1999 and they were ready for varnishing. The final titles were *The Abyss for an Angel* and *Darkover*.

He took part in the exhibition *San o letenju (A Dream of Flying)* at the Museum of Applied Arts in Belgrade, organized by the Yugoslav Airlines, and the collective exhibition *Victor Hugo et les artistes contemporains (Victor Hugo and Contemporary Artists)* at Chamalières (France), where he displayed two old paintings: *Cultivating Metal Boxes* and *Out of the Cocoons*. In Paris, on FIAC, Thessa Herold put on display one of his recent paintings.



Ljuba in his studio in Paris with the painting *Shadow and Light* (right) in the initial stages of work, 2002

Shadow and Light

2003.

The opposition between the forces of light and darkness, already apparent in his works painted since the early 1990s (*The City of Souls, The Death of a Maiden, Black Pulsations, Darkover*), was intensified. He painted the large-format painting *Shadow and Light* and *The Return of the Black Angel*, which was somewhat smaller and which he clearly defined as a painting “between heaven and hell”.

A major retrospective exhibition of Ljuba's works was organized in Subotica (Serbia). About a hundred paintings, done between 1953 and 2003, were brought together and displayed under the title *Ljuba ili Prizivanje svetlosti (Ljuba or the Evocation of Light)*. The introductory essay for the catalogue was written by Milenko Radović, an expert on Ljuba's life and work.

The monograph *Ljuba* was published by the Cercle d'Art. It placed the accent on the works from the previous two decades. The text was written by Sarane Alexandrian.

The Serbian national television, RTS – TV Belgrade, produced and presented a 90-minute show entitled *Umetničko veče: Ljuba (Art Evening: Ljuba)*. The presenter Zorica Pantelić then produced another show, *Ljuba Popović's Light and Shadow*. A close friendship was born

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Opening of the exhibition in Subotica; left to right: Ljuba, Milan Komnenić, Moma Pavlović, Zoltan Vida, 2003

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between Zorica Pantelić and Ljuba and it would last until Ljuba's last days.

Ljuba and Michel Poux made their first trip together, to Seychelles. The practice of travelling together to tropical areas for a week or two during winter would continue over the following years.

Exhibition in Subotica, press conference; left to right: Nikola Kusovac, Ljuba, Zoltan Vida, Moma Pavlović, 2003



The history of heads

2004.

At the Valjevo Modern Gallery, Ljuba organized an exhibition dedicated to cut-off heads. The previous year, he painted *A Contribution to the History of Cut-off Heads* specifically for this occasion. Giant heads would soon take an important place in his painting. Their mouths would be often wide open, symbolizing "the mouth of hell", which drew and swallowed tiny human figures. He finished the painting *Facing Darkness*.

When the monograph *Ljuba* by Sarane Alexandrian was published, Thessa Herold organized, at her gallery, a presentation of the book and a small retrospective exhibition of works done between 1973 and 2003.

In Belgrade, Ljuba started his collaboration with Živojin Ivanišević, the founder of the gallery *Umetnički prostor Pariski Klub*.

In March, Ljuba undertook a short trip to Israel, to the Dead Sea.

Ljuba and i Živojin Ivanišević at the gallery *Umetnički prostor Pariski Klub*



The Dream of Poisonous Flowers

2005.

In Paris, at the Rambert Gallery, a one-painting exhibition was organized: the large-scale painting (230×300 cm) *The Dream of Poisonous Flowers*, started the previous year, was put on display. The introductory essay for the catalogue was written by Michel Ellenberger. In a note made a few days after a very successful opening ceremony, Ljuba wrote: "This is not my dream, this watercolour with a dominant bluish hue and red pricks of evil. This is the acid taste of poi-

son exuded by each creature confronted with the inevitability of vanishing". The same year, he finished the paintings *Miraculous Séance* and *The Whiteness of Tomorrow* (dedicated to Živojin Pavlović).

In Belgrade, Ljuba took part in the exhibition organized by the gallery *Umetnički prostor Pariski Klub* on the occasion of the publication of the book *Pariski krug [Paris Circle] – Ljuba, Dado, Vladimir Veličković, Miloš Šobajić*.

Ljuba was introduced to Pierre Mahieu, the greatest collector of his drawings.

Ljuba, surrounded by visitors at the opening of the exhibition displaying *The Dream of Poisonous Flowers*, Paris, 2005

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Large format

2006.

Six Ljuba's paintings were displayed in Belgrade, at the gallery *Umetnički prostor Pariski Klub*. The exhibition was organized on the occasion of the publication of the monograph *Veliki format (Large Format)*. The text *Čarobnjak iz doline milosti (The Magician of Val de Grâce)* was written by Milan Komnenić. The latest paintings stirred in Ljuba a strange feeling that he was estranged from them.

Ljuba was more and more fatigue. He felt that his body was "plotting against him". The recovery from a knee surgery was difficult, but he continued to paint regularly, as before. He noted down that for him, painting was "a source of energy"



Ljuba and his "friend of all times" Rada Đuričin, at the opening of the exhibition *Veliki format*, Belgrade, 2006

that brought him "back to himself".

Ljuba finished the painting *Collapse*, which would soon be acquired by Michel Poux.

Milan Komnenić at the opening of the exhibition *Veliki format* at *Umetnički prostor Pariski Klub*, Belgrade, 2006



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The Expulsion from Paradise

2007.

Last touches were put to the large painting entitled *The Expulsion from Paradise*. Establishing a balance between pale blue and pink hues was truly a challenge. Satisfied with the result, Ljuba noted down that this painting might be his testament. At the same time, he was working on other, smaller paintings, which had temporary titles (*Blue Sphere, The Masts of Invisible Ships, Metallic Tears, Eclipse...*), seeking, as usual, "to establish a balance between daylight and subterranean nausea".

In Belgrade, he took part in the exhibition *Gstavu Morou u čast (Homage to Gustave Moreau)*. Ljuba was the in-

stigator of this exhibition organized at the gallery *Umetnički prostor Pariski Klub*. Two paintings, *Homage to Gustave Moreau* and *Orpheus' Lost Accords*, were painted specifically for this occasion. He also instigated the exhibition *Simbolično u srpskom slikarstvu (The Symbolic in Serbian Painting)* at the Valjevo Modern Gallery. Branko Kukić was the author of the exhibition and introductory essay for the catalogue.

Ljuba undertook another trip to the Seychelles with Michel Poux. The summer holiday in Greece was dedicated to rest and painting.

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Ljuba in Valjevo, 2008



Ljuba and Branko Kukić preparing the exhibition *Simbolično u srpskom slikarstvu*, Valjevo Modern Gallery, 2007



A very personal hell

2008.

Ljuba finished the painting *The Signs of the Deluge*, started in 2006. The whiteness of the canvas that has here and there remained intact creates the impression of vigour and clarity in the central section of the painting. Heads and tiny flying creatures, symbolizing lost souls, are emerging from the shadows surrounding a crystalline city. At the same time, he completed another large painting, *Lost Souls*, started in 2007. The third large-scale painting, the first outlines of which had been laid down on Orthodox Christmas Day (7 January), was completed very quickly. "Something exploded like a boil. The canvas opened as hell and got filled with nasty creatures, flying or falling in an abyss." In his personal notes, Ljuba explained that this was a very personal hell, and not the Bible Hell. Towards the end of the year, he would start working on two large paintings focused on the same topic, *Invitation to Hell* and *Innocence and Diabolical Forces*.

In the TV show for the Serbian national television *Moć slike: razgovor sa Ljubom Popovićem (The Power of Painting: a Conversation with Ljuba Popović)*, he was interviewed by Jasmina Simić.

In February, he made a two-week trip to the Seychelles. During the summer, he stayed in Xiropotami.

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Ljuba in front of the rough outlines of the painting *The Road to Hell*, Paris, 10 January 2008

Ljuba and his daughter Tiana in front of the paintings *The Hoard of Cursed Ships and Evaporation*, Paris, 2008



Planetary mission

2009.

Michel Poux, who had already had a collection of thirty-odd works by Ljuba, commissioned a huge painting of the same size (260x400 cm) as the central piece of *Homage to Sir James George Frazer* (1978). The canvas was stretched on the frame in September and the first strokes were laid down a few days later, while the canvas was still in the horizontal position. Ljuba noted down that the theme would probably have to do with the end of the world, the Apocalypse, the Antichrist's arrival... possibly a walk after death. Ljuba wondered whether he would be able to bring it to completion.

He was worried over his health, as the recovery after a knee replacement surgery was difficult. Despite joint pain that often prevented him from working, he painted persistently, because painting was the only thing that made his life meaningful – his “planetary mission”.



A rough sketch for the painting *Antichrist's Arrival*, Paris, September 2009

Ljuba finished a very sensual painting, *Innocence and Diabolical Forces*, and then another one, *Invitation to Hell*. As planned, both paintings were purchased by Michel Poux. *Sleepwalk II* was taken to Israel, whereas *Evaporation*, *Opening of the Abyss* and *The Abyss for Unknown Objects* ended up in Belgrade. At same time, he made two square paintings, entitled *Invitation to Hell I* and *Invitation to Hell II*, in which he revisited one of his favourite scenes: giant heads whose big mouths, wide open, were actually the mouth of Hell.

Ljuba also took part in the exhibition *Portret između realnosti i imaginacije (Portrait between Reality and Imagination)*, organized, based on his idea, at the Valjevo Modern Gallery. The same exhibition was later presented at *Umetnički prostor Pariski Klub in Belgrade*.

On 11 September, Sarane Alexandrian died.



Ljuba in front of the painting *Antichrist's Arrival*, still in the process of work, November 2009

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A Walk after Death

2010.

The large painting with the provisional title *Antichrist's Arrival* became *My Walk after Death* and the work progressed well. Ljuba repeatedly changed the face of one of the central figures because he could not harmonize it with the overall atmosphere of the painting. For him, this painting was "the last planetary howl before the final darkness". Nevertheless, he also noticed that the dark areas in the painting were still sparkling with stars. The universe was eternal, not humans.

Ljuba finished the painting *The Uniqueness of Demonic Action on the Body*. Acquired by Michel Poux, it would form a diptych with *Innocence and Diabolical Forces*. With a seemingly intact vigour, he painted several smaller canvases: *Blue Mask and Its Visitors*, *Pyramidal Love*, *Submerged Love*, *The Castle of the Last Hope*, *Black Castle*, *The Allegory of the Soul...*

In Serbia, at the Valjevo Modern Gallery, an exhibition of Ljuba's drawings was organized to commemorate the publication of the book *Ljuba: drawings, 1952-1962*, written by Milenko Radović.



Ljuba in his studio in Greece, sitting in front of an early version of *Loneliness*, Xiropotami, 2010



Ljuba in his studio in Paris, September 2010



Is there an afterlife?

2011.

Over the year, Ljuba was mostly focused on finishing the details of a large painting, the final title of which would be *Is There an afterlife?* The five central figures retained the vigour from the initial stages of work, except for one face, which was blurred after repeated changes. Ljuba would not touch them any more. These figures seem to represent all the states of a body between life and death. The body in the middle, bright and airy, might symbolize a rising soul, leaving behind a feeble and perishing body, and a stiff corpse under its feet. He started to populate the peripheral areas of the painting, immersed in darkness, with little demons, tormented souls, skulls, grinning heads, various fantastic creatures... Ljuba was not religious. What he said and wrote seems to reveal the following idea of an afterlife: if there were life after death, it could be attained, for a time, through paintings only.

During the first half of the year, Ljuba worked on the paintings *The Inventory of Bizarre Objects and Sorcerer*.

The Queen of Fire (two towers in flame), The Mouth of Hell, The Island of Lost Heads, The Beauty and a Robot, Ruin in Flames, and a series of small canvases were painted in Greece, during the

summer. The opposition between the body-light and the evil forces of darkness was frequently present in these paintings. Giant heads were depicted on several canvases.



The central section of the painting *Is there an afterlife?*, 2011

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Ljuba Popović and Zorica Tomić, Ambassador of Serbia to UNESCO, Paris 2011





Ljuba Popović and Slavica Batos during a break in the process of varnishing the painting *Is There an Afterlife?*, 2012

A painting in a castle

2012.

The painting *Is There an Afterlife?* was finished, varnished, dismantled from the frame and sent to the commissioner and the future owner, Michel Poux. His castle was being reconstructed at the time. Once the reconstruction had been completed, the Assy Castle hosted the biggest private collection of Ljuba's works, mainly large-scale paintings.

Although distraught over parting with his "testament painting", Ljuba continued to paint. During summer, in Greece, he started working on several paintings, which would get their definitive form in Paris: *Rolla's Destiny (Homage to Henri Gervex)*, *Metamorphosis*, *The Master of Lost Souls*, *Invasion before the Deluge*, *Saturn's Head...*

The milestone of the year was the

collective exhibition dedicated to Dada and Surrealist painters *Chassé-croisé Dada-surréaliste, 1916-1969 (Dada-Surrealist Mess, 1916-1969)*. The exhibition was instigated by Georges Sebbag, who also wrote the introductory essay for the catalogue.



The painting *Is There an Afterlife?* in the Assy Castle, 2015



A year without large formats

2013.

This was one of the rare years when Ljuba did not paint any large-scale paintings. He worked on several paintings around one metre in size (162×130 cm): *The Fiancées from Hell*, *White Smoke*, *Metamorphoses*, etc.

In Belgrade, Ljuba took part in the presentation of the book *Ljuba: slike iz privatnih kolekcija* [*Ljuba: paintings from private collections*]. The book included essays by Nikola Kusovac, Sreto Bošnjak, Milan Komnenić and Dejan Đorić and was published by the gallery *Umetnički prostor Pariski Klub*, which also organized an exhibition of Ljuba's paintings reproduced in the book.



Ljuba Popović with art collectors Draža and Marijana Marčić; the photo was taken at the time of the exhibition *Ljuba: slike iz privatnih kolekcija*, Belgrade, 2013

The Valjevo Modern Gallery displayed one of the most beautiful private collections of Ljuba's paintings in Serbia, that of the Ćurković family. The texts for the catalogue were written by Ljuba Popović and Nikola Kusovac.

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Ljuba and Ivan Ćurković, preparations for the exhibition at the Valjevo Modern Gallery, 2013



Ljuba and Nikola Kusovac, Xiropotami, 2014



Ljuba with his son Aleksa, Xiropotami, 2014



Hasty, more expressive

2014.

Starting with 2012–2013, Ljuba’s art revealed the traits of a “modernism” due to the hasty, more spontaneous and more expressive rendering. This is evidenced in the paintings *Woman-Owl*, *The Invasion of Blue Objects*, *The Beauty in a Metallic Wood*, *Tears under the Sun*, *Bestial Love*, etc. The focus was always laid on woman’s body, bright, shameless, threatening and, at the same time, threatened. Skulls and heads with horrifying expressions were present to the point of becoming the only subject of

the painting, e.g. in *The Tower of Cut-Off Heads*.

Ljuba took part in several group exhibitions in Valjevo and Belgrade. The gallery *Umetnički prostor Pariski Klub* and the Serbian publisher Paideia published a book that contained the reproductions of Ljuba’s works and selected texts about his arts.

The painting *Mystery in Full Light* was displayed at a one-painting exhibition in Valjevo. The catalogue brought the details of the painting and a text by Alain Vuillot.

A quiet summer in Greece was marked by interesting discussions with Nikola Kusovac.



Macabre and romantic

2015.

Faithful to the hasty and expressive manner and mostly macabre subjects, Ljuba painted *The Mirrors of Forgotten Ghosts*, *Evil Forces*, *Dance Macabre*, *White Moon*, etc. *Styx-River* and *The Secret of the Red Sea*, which reveal melancholy and romanticism interspersed with anguish, were the only exceptions. He undertook to paint the large-scale painting *The Empire of Satan*.

Eleven large paintings were displayed at the RTS Gallery in Belgrade. The introductory essay for the catalogue was written by Ljuba's friend and expert on his art, Milan Komnenić, who died three months after the opening of the exhibition. On the day of the opening, a presentation of the monograph *Ljuba: selected works, 1953/2015*, published by *Pariski krug*, RTS

and *Službeni glasnik*, was organized. It featured selected texts by various authors.

Four Ljuba's paintings were displayed at the exhibition *The Collection of Draško Milićević*.

Zorica Pantelić's show *Vreme (je) za elitu (The Time [Is] for the Elite)* entirely dedicated to Ljuba was aired on the Serbian national television, TV RTS, in December.

Anne Tronche, art critic and theorist, Ljuba's friend and the author of a remarkable essay published in a monograph about his art, suddenly died in October. Deeply affected by her death, Ljuba dedicated to her the painting *Antinea*.



Ljuba in front of the unfinished painting *The Empire of Satan*, Paris, 2015

Opening of the exhibition at the RTS Gallery, Belgrade, October 2015





The last paintings

2016.

Early in 2016, during a visit to Ljuba's studio, Thessa and Jacques Herold came up with a proposal to organize an exhibition of his works at their gallery, just before the summer break. The paintings were already prepared and it only remained to complete *The Empire of Satan* and refine a few details in the others. The exhibition was opened in June. It was dedicated to Anne Tronche. Her text *Ljuba: le monde des tables et des souterrains* (*Ljuba: the world of tables and basements*), taken from the book *Chronique d'une scène parisienne* (*Chronicle of a Parisian Scene*, published by Hazan), was included in the catalogue, along with Mathilde Marchand's text about Ljuba's art and an essay by



Thessa and Jacques Herold dedicated to Anne Tronche.

After the opening, Ljuba left for Greece. As usual, he started working on several paintings immediately upon arrival. However, the work was disrupted by health problems. His condition became complicated and he was urgently transferred to a hospital in Belgrade. He died on the night between 11 and 12

August. For the first time, his studio in Val de Grâce Street in Paris was empty in September.

Ljuba avec Thessa et Jacques Herold avant le vernissage, Paris, juin 2016.



Studio in Val de Grâce Street, September 2016



..... SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 1964 Paris, Galerie Edouard Smith, Armand Zerbib
- 1966 Paris, Galerie Diderot, Marcel Zerbib
Brusells, Galerie Diderot, Marcel Zerbib
- 1971 Brusells, Galerie Isy Brachot
Paris, Galerie de Seine, Thessa Herold
- 1972 Paris, Galerie de Seine, Thessa Herold
- 1974 Paris, Galerie de Seine, Thessa Herold
New York, Aberbach Fine Arts
- 1976 Paris, Galerie de Seine, Thessa Herold, *Ljuba - dessins et lavis*
- 1978 Paris, Galerie Beaubourg, Marianne et Pierre Nahon, Patrice Trigano
Kruishoutem, Belgium, Fondation Veranneman
- 1979 Paris, Galerie de Seine, Thessa Herold, Grand Palais, FIAC 79
- 1981 Paris, Galerie Isy Brachot, Christine et Isy Brachot, *Ljuba (aquarelles et lavis, 1979-1980)*
Péruges, France, La Maison de des Princes
New-York, Espace Pierre Cardin Evolution, *Ljuba - a Retrospective*
- 1982 Paris, Galerie Marion Meyer, *Ljuba (Dessins-Lavis-Peintures, 1958-1982)*
- 1983 Budva, Yougoslavie, Moderna Galerija Budva, *Ljuba Popović, watercolors and ink wash drawings 1980-1983*
- 1984 Kruishoutem, Belgium, Fondation Veranneman
- 1985 Valjevo, Yugoslavia, Moderna Galerija Valjevo, *Ljuba - yugoslav period, from 1953 to 1963*
- 1986 Munich, Germany, Galerie Richter & Masset
- 1990 Paris, Galerie Michel Delorme, Grand Palais, FIAC 90
- 1991 Fribourg, Switzerland, L'art fantastique au Château de Gruyères, *Ljuba - Jeux d'ombres et miroirs d'eau*
Genève, Switzerland, Galerie Guy Bärtschi, *Ljuba: Aquarelle - lavis - dessins*
- 1994 Genève, Switzerland, Galerie Guy Bärtschi
- 1996 Paris, Galerie Thessa Herold, *Les années Galerie de Seine 1971-1981*
- 1998 Paris, Galerie Thessa Herold
Belgrade, Yugoslavia, Galerija Verica Art, *Ljuba - Diptych*
- 1999 Paris, Galerie la Hune-Brenner, *Ljuba - Œuvres sur papier*

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- 2003 Subotica, Serbia, Galerija Likovni susret, a retrospective exhibition *Ljuba Popović or the Evocation of Light*
Paris, Galerie Thessa Herold, *Ljuba - Peintures 1973 - 2003*
- 2005 Paris, Galerie Rambert, Abel Rambert, one painting exhibition,
The Dream of Poisonous Flowers
- 2006 Belgrade, Serbia, Umetnički prostor Pariski krug, *Large formats*
- 2010 Valjevo, Serbia, Moderna galerija Valjevo, *Ljuba - drawings, 1952-1962*
- 2013 Belgrade, Serbia, Umetnički prostor Pariski krug,
Ljuba from private collections
Belgrade, Serbia, Umetnički prostor Pariski krug
Valjevo, Serbia, Moderna galerija Valjevo, *Collection Ćurković*
- 2014 Valjevo, Serbia, Moderna galerija Valjevo, one painting exhibition,
Mystery in Bright Light
- 2015 Belgrade, Serbia, Galerija RTS, *Ljuba - Selected Works*
- 2016 Paris, Galerie Thessa Herold, *Ljuba - hommage à Anne Tronche*
Novi Sad, Serbia, Muzej Grada Novog Sada, artworks from the Dragoslav
Draž Marčić collection
- 2016 Valjevo, Serbia, Moderna galerija Valjevo, exhibition of triptych *Homage to
sir James George Frazer (1977-1978)*
- 2017 Valjevo, Serbia, Moderna galerija Valjevo, *Ljuba - painting*
- 2019 Belgrade, Serbia, Srpska Akademija nauka i umetnosti,
A retrospective exhibition

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Alain Bosquet, *Ljuba*, Bruxelles : La Connaissance, 1974.

Jean-Louis Ferrier, Aleksa Ćelebonović, André Pieyre de Mandiargues, Gustav René Hocke, Jean-Christophe Bailly, Jean-Clarence Lambert, René de Solier, Yvonne Caroutch, Zoran Pavlović, Anne Tronche, Dušan Makavejev, Alain Bosquet, *Ljuba*, Paris : Pierre Belfond, 1978.

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Jovica Aćin, *Ljuba Popović – Odiseja jedne senke*, Čačak-Beograd: Umetničko Društvo Gradac, 2000.

Sarane Alexandrian, *Ljuba*, Paris : Editions Cercle d'Art, 2003.

Saran Aleksandrijan, *Ljuba*, Valjevo-Čačak-Pariz: Agencija Valjevac-Umetničko Društvo Gradac-Editions Cercle d'Art, 2003.

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Nikola Kusovac, Sreto Bošnjak, Milan Komnenić, Dejan Đorić, *Ljuba – Iz privatnih kolekcija*, Beograd: Pariski krug, 2013.

Nikola Kusovac, Sreto Bošnjak, Milan Komnenić, Dejan Đorić, *Ljuba – Collections privées*, Beograd: Pariski krug, 2013.

Milan Komnenić, Anne Tronche, Sreto Bošnjak, Dejan Đorić, *Ljuba*, Beograd: Paideia/Pariski krug, 2014.

Saran Aleksandrijan, Gustav Rene Hoke, Andre Pjer de Mandijarg, Sem Hanter, Rene de Solije, An Tronš, Ljuba Popović, Milan Komnenić, Sreto Bošnjak, Nikola Kusovac, Dejan Đorić, *Ljuba*, Beograd: Pariski krug/Rts/Glasnik, 2015.

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Philippe Soupault, *Collection Fantôme*, 1973. [In quarto format, 75 copies on Arches paper numbered from 1 to 75 and 30 copies numbered from i to xxx, signed by Philippe Soupault, with four original engravings signed by Bona, Camacho, Cardenas and Ljuba]

Jean-Clarence Lambert et Ljuba, *Les plaisirs difficiles*, coll. *Les cahiers du regard*, Paris : Pierre Belfond, 1975. [In folio format (590 x 400), seven original engravings of Ljuba. Limited edition of 99 copies, 10 copies numbered from 1 to 10 with seven original engravings on Arches vellum, and a series of engravings on vellum Auvergne]

Francesca Caroutch et Ljuba, *Vol de la vacuité*, Saint Clément de rivière : Fata Morgana, 1990. [In-folio format (280 x 190). Limited edition of 15 copies on Arches vellum, each featuring an original painting by Ljuba, presented under cover]

Emile Ollivier, Mohror, Ljuba, *Regarde, regarde les lions*, coll. *Le miroir étoilé*, Paris : Myriam Solal Editeur, 1995. [Edition limited to 25 copies on Job ivory and Rives Classic paper, numbered and signed from 1 to 25. Each copy is enriched with a drawing of Ljuba and an original photograph of Mohror, bound and presented under a cover]

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.....CATALOGUE.....

1. **Unknown (Invisible Man)**, 1957
Oil on canvas, 88 × 70 cm
Private Collection

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2. **Yellow Person**, 1957

Oil on canvas, 94 × 70 cm

Miloljub and Ivan Perić Collection, Belgrade



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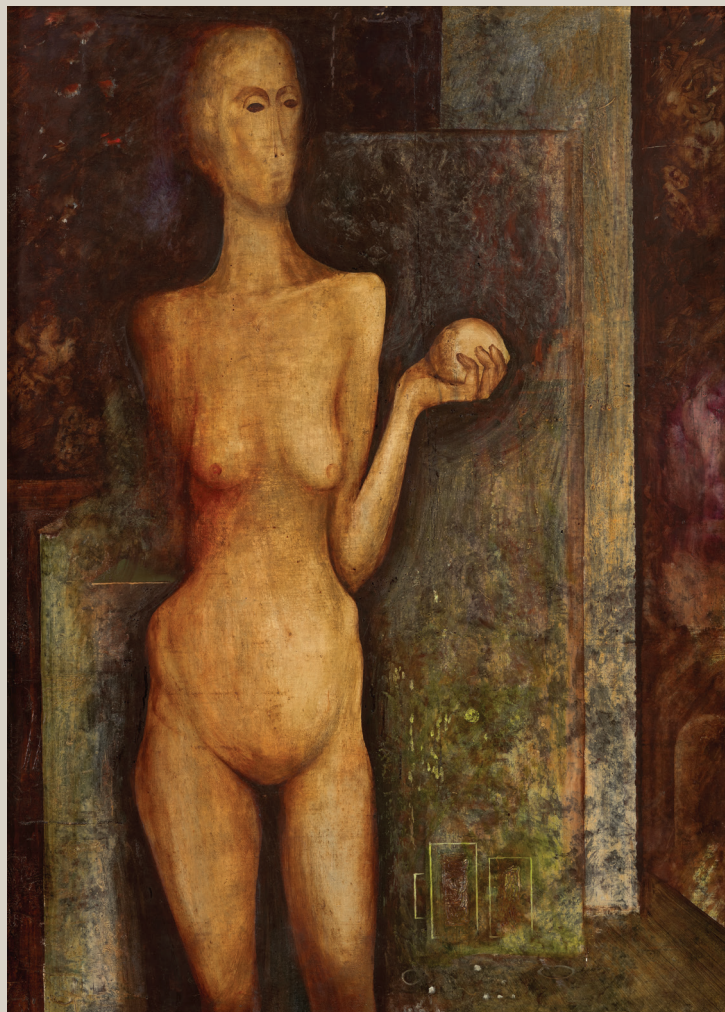




3. **Cleopatra, a model (Cleopatra with an Apple), 1958**

Oil on canvas, 130 × 94 cm

Owner: Valjevo Modern Gallery, Valjevo



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4. **The Guardian of the Dome**, 1958
Oil on canvas, 138 × 120 cm
Owner: **National Museum**, Kragujevac



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5. **The Arrival of Hermaphrodites or The Green Image of the Attic**, 1959

Oil on canvas, 138 × 180 cm

Owner: Radivoje Dražović, Belgrade

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6. **Judgment - Execution (Continued Judgment)**, 1959

Oil on canvas 138 × 190 cm

Owner: Valjevo Modern Gallery, Valjevo



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7. **Damsel's Nude**, 1959
Oil on canvas, 180 × 130 cm
Marčić Collection, Belgrade

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8. **An Elder and Susannas**, 1959
Oil on canvas, 184 × 136 cm
Owner: National Museum, Belgrade



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9. **Untitled**, 1960—1961
Oil on canvas, 47.3 × 60 cm
Marčić Collection, Belgrade

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10. **Untitled (Landscape with a Child)**, 1960—1961

Oil on canvas, 75 × 96 cm

Marčić Collection, Belgrade



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11. **The Supper at Emmaus**, 1962

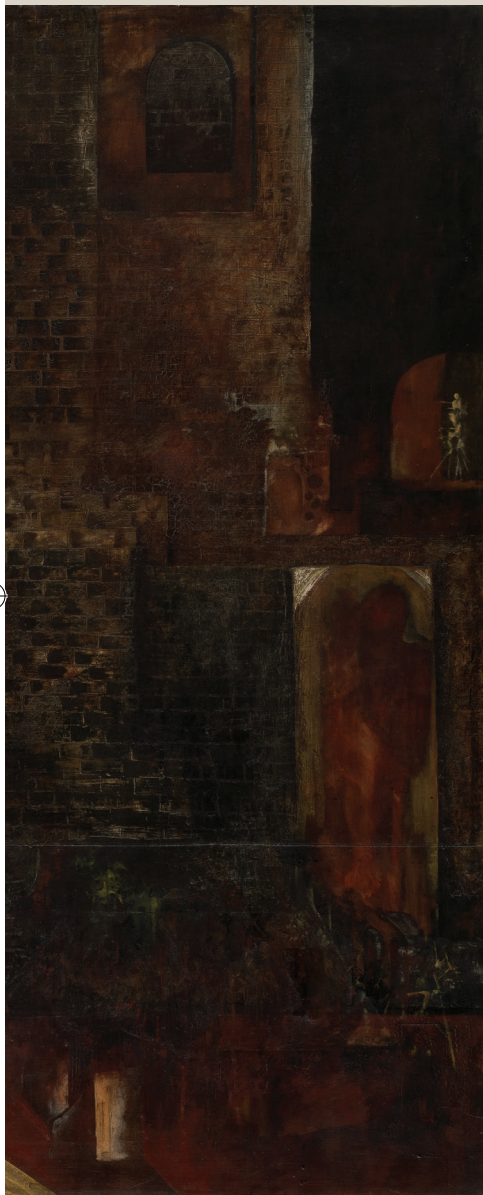
Oil on canvas, 187 × 280 cm

Owner: **Museum of Contemporary Art, Belgrade**





12. **Saint Sebastian Exhumed**, 1961—1962
Oil on canvas, 179 × 137 cm
Owner: **Museum of Contemporary Art, Belgrade**



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13. **The Time of Androids**, 1968
Oil on canvas, 162 × 130 cm
Private Collection

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14. **Mirror**, 1967

Oil on canvas, 102 × 64 cm

Marčić Collection, Belgrade



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15. **Strange Evaporation**, 1968
Oil on canvas, 50 × 61 cm
Miloljub and Ivan Perić Collection, Belgrade

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16. **A Room in Florence**, 1970—1971

Oil on canvas, 162 × 162 cm

Owner: Family **Marjanović**, Belgrade





17. **Poisonous Mushrooms**, 1971
Oil on canvas, 81 × 54 cm
Owner: **Nenad Damjanović**, Belgrade

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18. **Venus and Death or The Garden for Venus**, 1970—1972

Oil on canvas, 210 × 290 cm

Private Collection



19. **Sabra or Homage to Mrs Roben, 1972**

Oil on canvas, 195 × 130 cm

Owner: **Zvonko Biro, Zemun**



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20. **Florence or The Birth of Melancholy**, 1972—1973

Oil on canvas, 162 × 130 cm

Owner: **Nenad Damjanović**, Belgrade



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21. **Prayer or The Key to the Universe**, 1973

Oil on canvas, 220 × 200 cm

Private Collection

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22. **Pearl**, 1973—1974
Oil on canvas, 100 × 81 cm
Private Collection



23. **A Lesson in Sodomy**, 1974
Oil on canvas, 162 × 130 cm
Private Collection



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24. **Cosmic Consciousness**, 1975
Oil on canvas, 250 × 200 cm
Owner: Family Marjanović, Belgrade



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25. **Lady Tamer and the Ghosts**, 1975—1976

Oil on canvas, 240 × 190 cm

Private Collection



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26. **The Beauty of the Day or John Chrysostom or The Days of the Sun**, 1975—1976
Oil on canvas, 210 × 300 cm
Private Collection



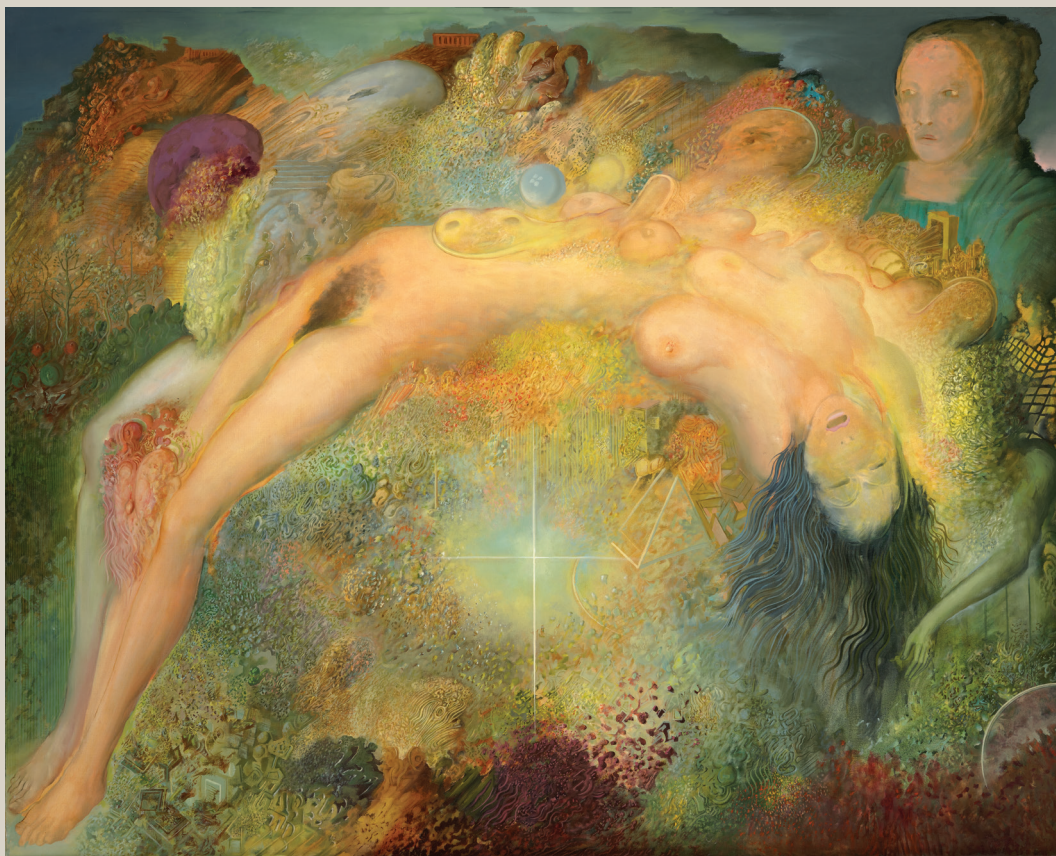


27. **Scream**, 1976

Oil on canvas, 130 × 162 cm

Owner: Radojica Mihajlović, Belgrade

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28. **The Tower of Lost Souls or Homage to G. R. Hocke**, 1976 or 1980
Oil on canvas, 100 × 81 cm
Private Collection



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29. **Homage to Sir James George Frazer**, 1976—1978

Oil on canvas, 260 × 800 cm (triptych)

Owner: Valjevo Modern Gallery, Valjevo

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30. **Desire III, Paradise Lost**, 1978
Oil on canvas, 200 × 195 cm
Private Collection





31. **A Lesson in Sensuality**, 1979—1980
Oil on canvas, 195 × 130 cm
Owner: Radivoje Dražović, Belgrade

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32. **Ecstasy or Homage to Arnold Böcklin, 1982**

Oil on canvas, 195 × 160 cm

Owner: Radivoje Dražović, Belgrade



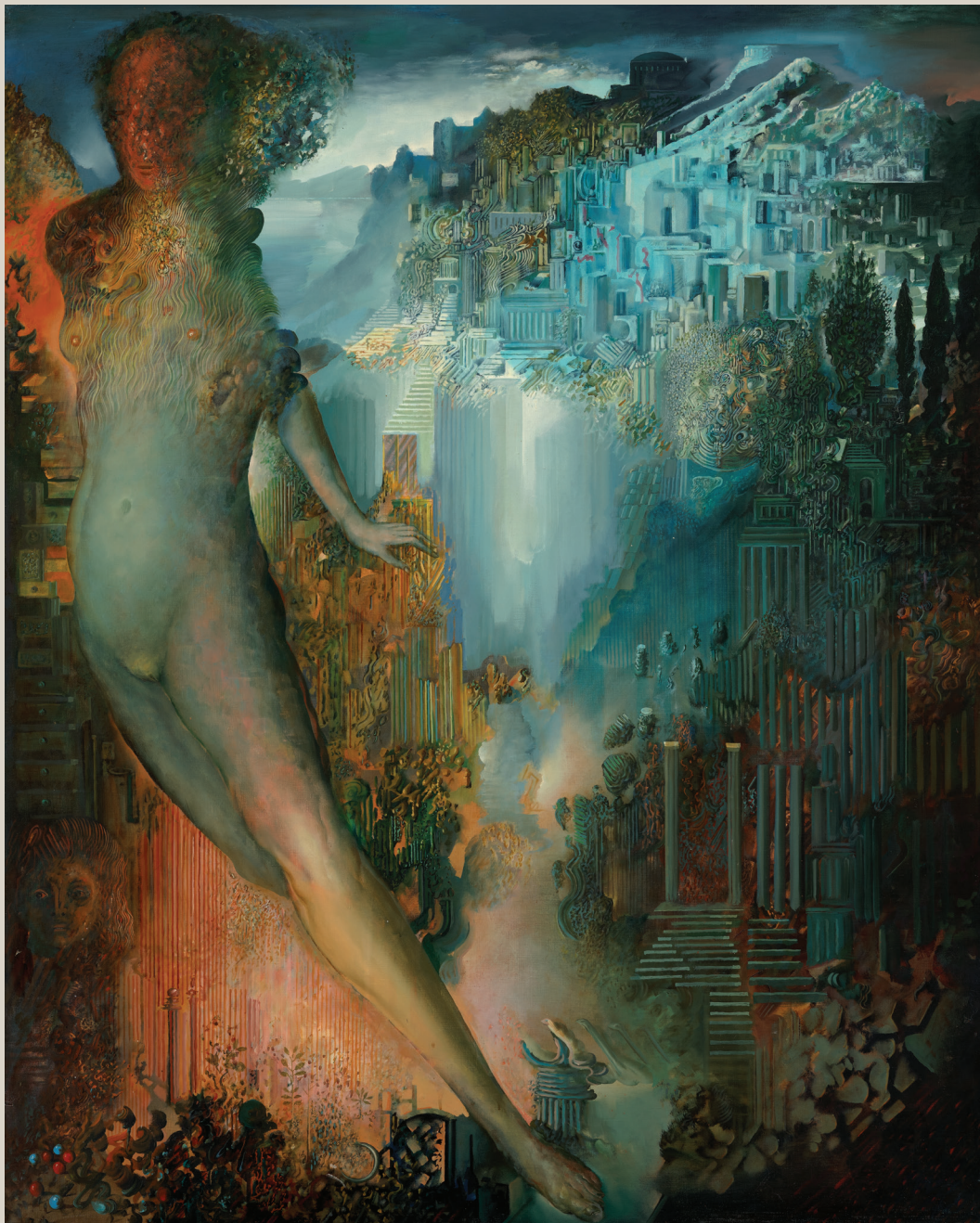
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33. **The Pipe Organ for the Body**, 1983
Oil on canvas, 162 × 130 cm
Owner: Family Miladinović, Belgrade

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34. **Disintegration in Time**, 1986
Oil on canvas, 162 × 130 cm
Owner: Dušan Savić, Belgrade



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35. **Under the Sign of the Cross**, 1987
Oil on canvas, 195 × 160 cm
Owner: **Gallery Rhino**, Belgrade

36. **The Labyrinth of the Apocalypse**, 1988—1989
Oil on canvas, 220 × 200 cm
Private Collection

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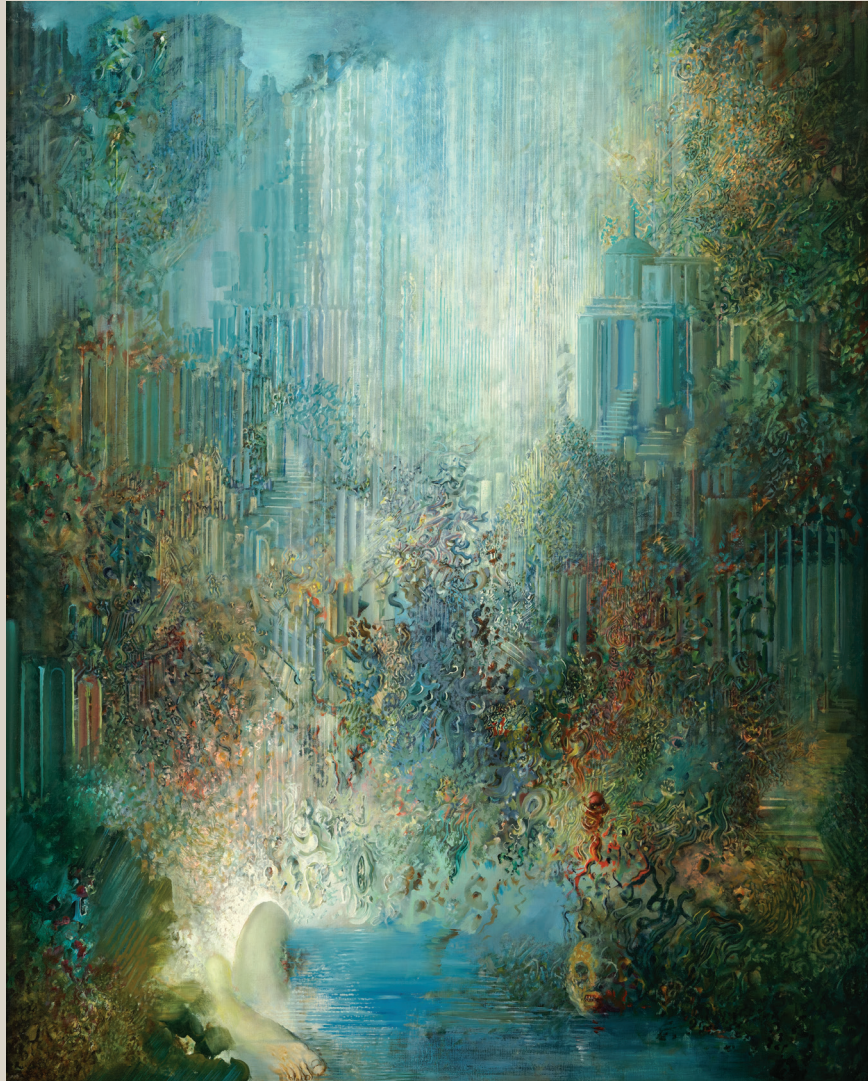


37. **The Revelation of Reality or Concealed Lovers**, 1989

Oil on canvas, 162 × 130 cm

Private Collection

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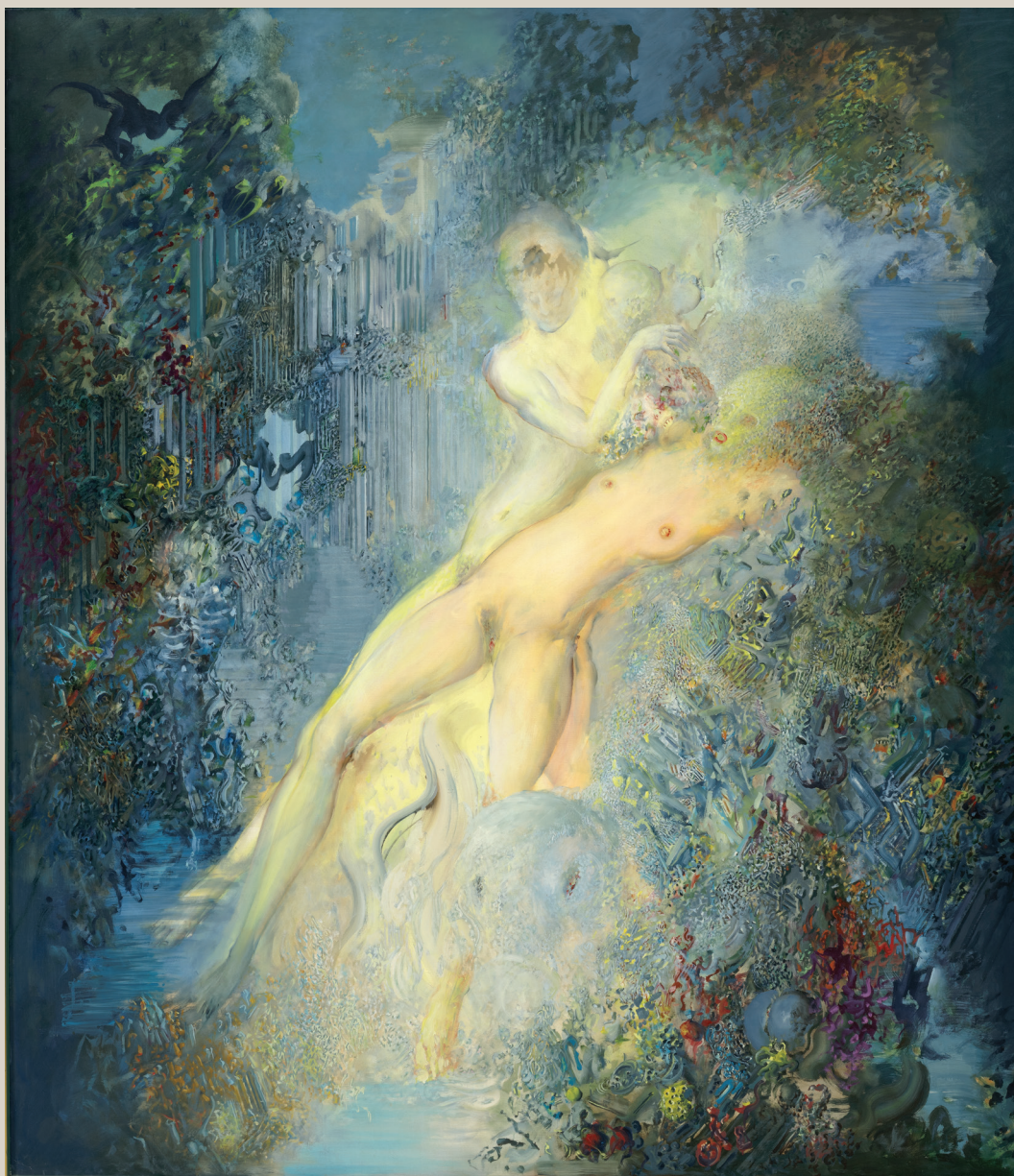




38. **The Big Picture of Evil**, 1992—1993

Oil on canvas, 230 × 200 cm

Owner: **Dunav Insurance Company**, Belgrade



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39. **Sun's Death**, 1993—1994

Oil on canvas, 230 × 200 cm

Owner: Oil Industry of Serbia (NIS), Novi Sad



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40. **Time Tombs (Dan Simmons)**, 1998—1999
Oil on canvas, 230 × 200 cm
Private Collection



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41. **The Illusion of a Space (for Eternity) or Blue Monasteries**, 1989—2003

Oil on canvas, 195 × 160 cm

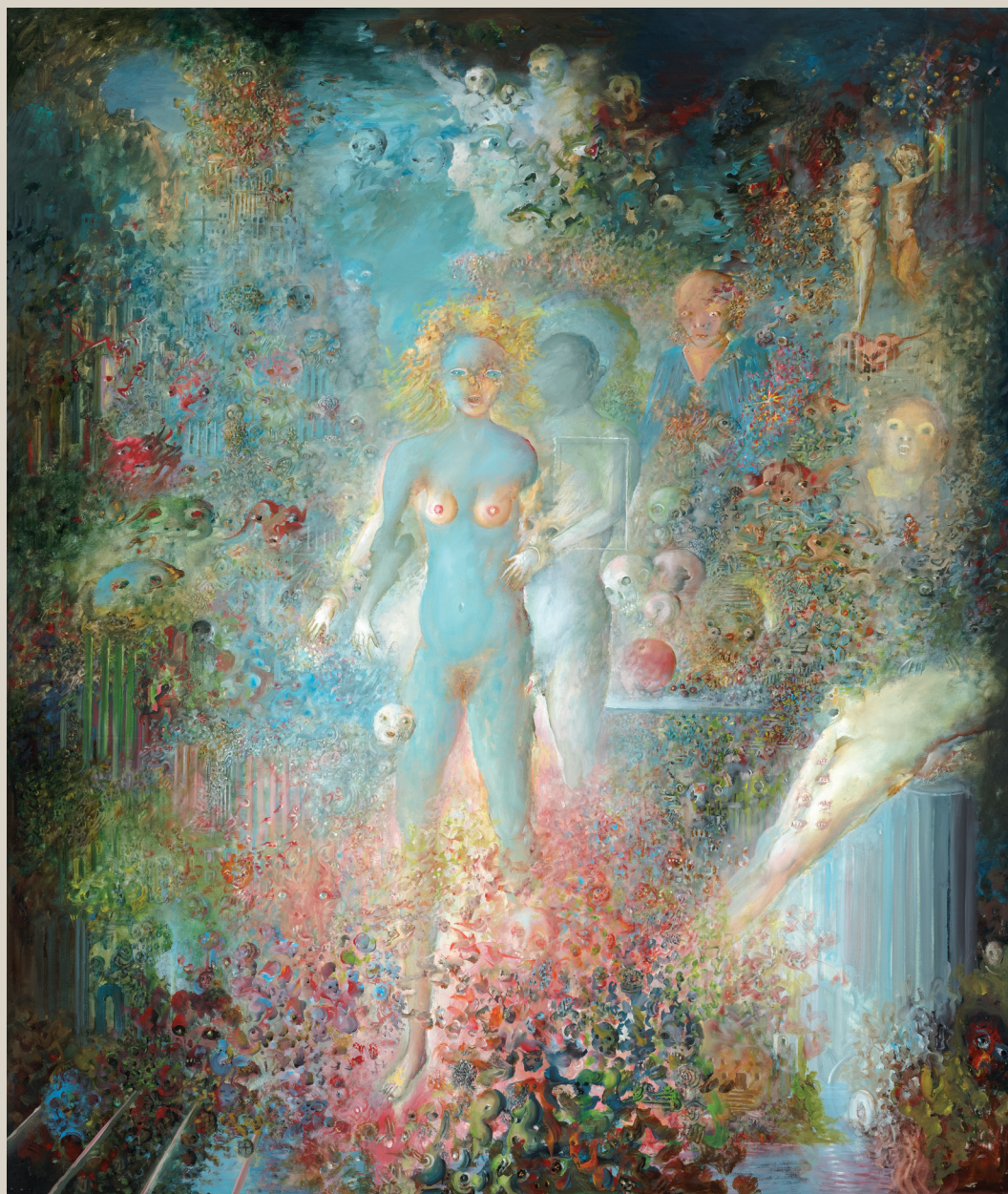
Owner: Radojica Mihajlović, Belgrade

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42. **The Demiurge or The Expulsion from Paradise (Creation of the World, Adam and Eve)**, 2006—2007, Oil on canvas, 235 × 200 cm
Marčić Collection, Belgrade



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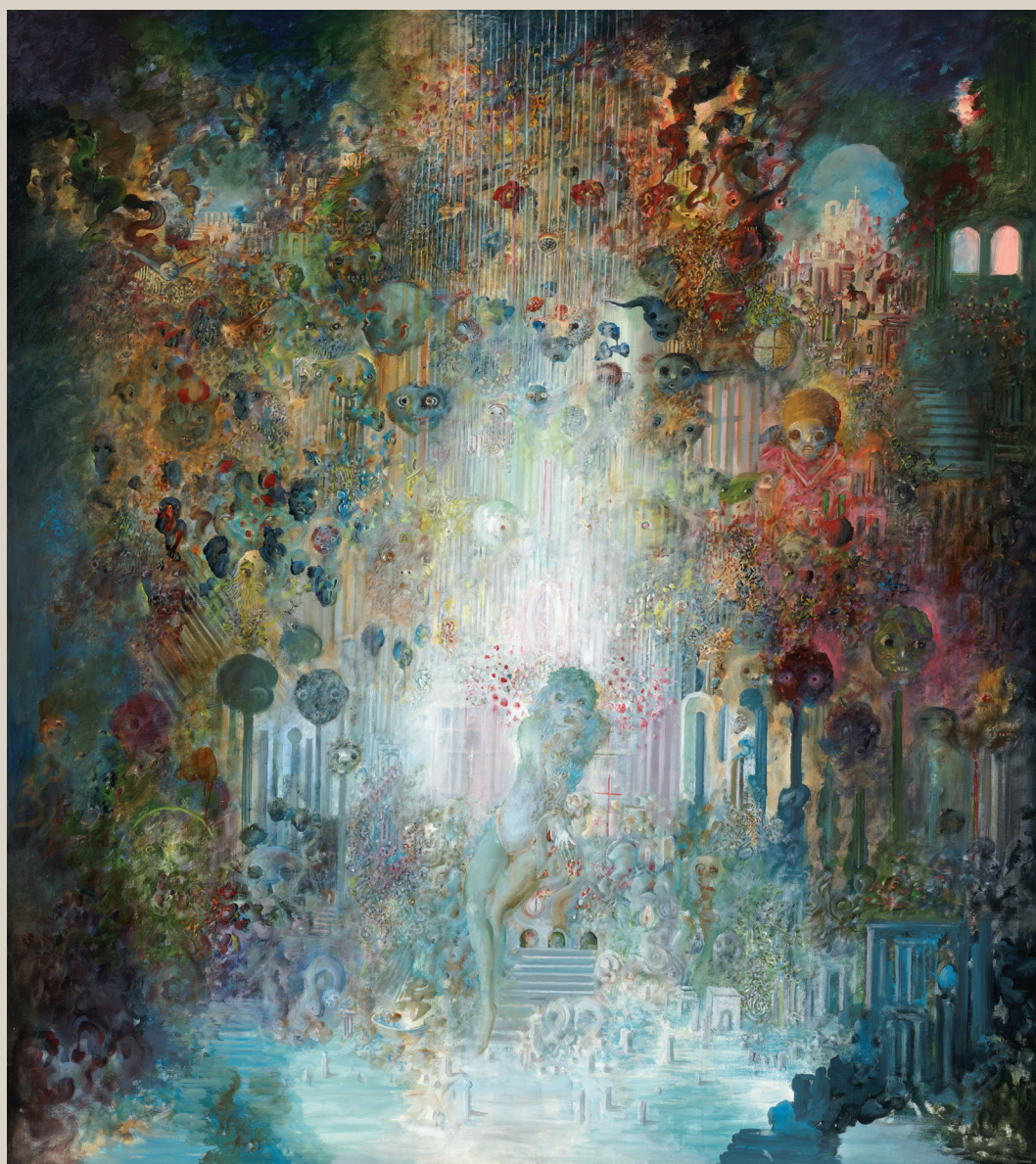


43. **The Glow of Embers or Lost Souls**, 2007—2008

Oil on canvas, 220 × 200 cm

Owner: Association of Painters of the Gallery Beli Andeo, Belgrade

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44. **Blue Mask and its Visitors**, 2009–2010
Oil on canvas, 130 × 162 cm
Owner: Zvonko Biro, Zemun





45. **The Mouth of Hell**, 2011
Oil on canvas, 137 × 97 cm
Owner: Zvonko Biro, Zemun

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