

*But the most important of all human features for the grotesque is the mouth. It dominates all else.
The grotesque face is actually reduced to the gaping mouth; the other features are only a frame
encasing this wide-open bodily abyss.*

Mikhail Bakhtin

The new artistic production *A SMILE, SMIRK, SNEER, SNICKER (or teeth as language)* by artist Lala Raščić continues her ongoing exploration of the Gorgon motif. Her work is centered on the figure of Medusa¹, presented in myth as a being whose gaze turns others to stone, while her face—with its gaping mouth, piercing stare and snakes instead of hair—stands out as one of the most striking emblems of ancient iconography². As an apotropaic sign that appears in architecture, on shields and everyday objects, it functions as a grotesque, protective face that repels evil with its gaze.

Starting from the archaic Greek depiction of the Gorgoneion, liberated from its narrative and cultural context, the artist further deconstructs and stylizes the motif, shifting the focus to the smile as an ambivalent sign that maintains the tension between attraction and apprehension. Here, the smile appears as an element stripped of its psychological and social function, reduced to its own materiality. Isolated from the face as whole, it loses stability and its function of a sign that signifies. With further stylization the artist moves onto the mouth, into the oral cavity, where teeth are treated as a site for the production of meaning and a place where meaning manifests as a bodily expression.

The exhibition narrative unfolds through a series of interwoven, yet, media- and performance-wise, distinct segments, including a time-based installation, sound, sculpture and drawing. The central part consists of a lumino-kinetic installation composed of suspended glass elements of various sizes and shapes arranged in a unified horizontal composition. Each element is fabricated with precision and subsequently visually articulated by Raščić in *verre églomisé*, a gilding technique where precious metal leaves are applied to glass. The surfaces are partially filled with gold and silver tones, with linear and ornamental details emphasizing their organically shaped forms. These fragmented depictions of the jaw dismantle the unity of the hypothetical body and introduce it to a state of dispersion, whereby recognizable forms transform into open, multiplied and spatially scattered elements. Reflections and refractions of light alter the way these glass elements are perceived,

¹ Lala Raščić's artistic practice unfolds through intermedial formats (performance, video, installation, objects, drawings, etc.), within which the artist systematically explores the relationships between narrative, the body and cultural patterns. Her work originates from an interest in ancient mythology, South Slavic folk heritage and historical models of storytelling, which she subjects to critical reading and reinterpretation from feminist and postcolonial perspectives, thereby questioning dominant structures of knowledge, representation and authority. This approach is evident in a series of projects dedicated to the figure of Medusa and related mythological motifs, such as *Frau Ritter* (2024), *The Laugh of the Medusa* (2022), *EE-0* (2021), *Gorgo* (2019–2021), *The more tongues you silence, the more they talk* (2021), *The Eumenides* (2014–2018), among others.

² According to Greek mythology, Medusa was one of the three Gorgon sisters and the only mortal among them, known for turning her victims to stone with her gaze. There are several versions of this myth, the most widespread being the one recorded by Ovid in *Metamorphoses*, according to which Medusa was an exceptionally beautiful maiden who was raped by Poseidon in the temple of Athena, the goddess of wisdom. As punishment for the desecration of her temple, Athena transformed her into a monster with snakes instead of hair and a petrifying gaze. In later versions of the Medusa myth, the central role is taken by Perseus, who, with the help of the reflection in a bronze shield, beheads her. From her body sprang the winged horse Pegasus, while her head retained its power and was placed on Athena's shield as a protective emblem, the Gorgoneion.

making them simultaneously present and displaced, while the relationship between viewer and space is constantly reshaped.

An important structural element of the installation is also the homage to Jagoda Buić, visible through abstract patterns taken from her monumental tapestry *Crno Listanje (Black Leafing)*³, in which Raščić recognizes a rhythm of layers that is almost repetitive, yet not controlled. Extracted and enlarged details of ribbed textures, present through shadows rather than reflection, visually and symbolically enhance the unified glass composition. The camera obscura and ambiental soundscape further intensify the spatial dynamics of the installation, transforming it into a comprehensive experience emerging from the sensory interplay of space, light and sound.

The sculpturally treated dental prosthetic object, based on the cast of the artist's own mouth, is introduced as an autonomous object that simultaneously evokes the body and departs from it. Certain teeth are enlarged and morphologically deformed, removed from sequence, coated in gold or shaped in ceramic, disrupting their mutual harmony. In such reorganization, the dental form separates from anatomy and abandons its original function. The presentation of the object in the exhibition space introduces an additional symbolic dimension: placed on a pedestal, precisely lit and enclosed under a glass dome, the object belonging to prosthetic dentistry takes on the character of a relic—protected and emphasized in its presence.

The exhibited drawings, apart from serving as documentation of the creative process, also function as connective tissue between installation and object, where forms of the jaw and the teeth are continuously examined and reshaped. The line is rapid, restless and repeatedly drawn. Form is constructed through overlaps, repetitions and variations, as an action based on the relationships between line, volume and rhythm.

Through stylization, fragmentation and deformation of form, Lala Raščić builds layered compositions that move between the recognizable and the abstract, between the attractive and the repulsive. Teeth thus become carriers of meaning, while variations of the smile—from restrained to mocking—open a space in which meaning continues to transform. This orientation toward the body can be read in relation to Hélène Cixous's essay *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1975), one of the reference points of this work. For Cixous, meaning is not transmitted but established through the body, its fragmentation and exposure. The smile no longer remains in the function of a sign but appears as an unstable form that escapes fixation.

In this instability, the body is no longer a closed whole but unfinished and permeable, in constant becoming—corresponding to what Mikhail Bakhtin defines as the grotesque body⁴. Within such a body, death and renewal, destruction and birth appear as inseparable moments of the same cycle. Its boundaries are most clearly manifested in the motif of the mouth and teeth, at the site where exchange between interior and exterior, body and world takes place. Fragmented and isolated elements of the gaping mouth continue this logic of openness. In this work, the grotesque functions as an operative principle structuring both its conceptual-content level and its constructive-formal framework, encompassing in its ambivalence both poles of change—old and new, destruction and

³ The tapestry *Crno Listanje (Black Leafing)*, 1978, by Jagoda Buić is located in the building of the Electric Utility of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Elektroprivreda BiH d.d.) in Sarajevo, which was designed in the same year by the Bosnian-Herzegovinian architect Ivan Štraus.

⁴ Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and His World*. Translated by Helene Iswolsky. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984.

creation. Its effect is evident in the dismantling of established relations and the formation of new connections, opening the possibility of a different order beyond the apparent stability of the existing. The grotesque principle employed by Raščić affirms that the only constant is change.

A SMILE, SMIRK, SNEER, SNICKER (or teeth as language) is a layered artistic project in which the artist symbolically rounds off her long-term exploration of the Medusa myth. The work develops through various media—from drawings, through object, to installation—in which the motifs of the jaw and teeth are fragmented, abstracted and spatially organized, while the form simultaneously functions as a bearer of content and as a creative principle that shapes all the parts into a coherent whole. The technical realization of the work is based on precise and complex processing of various sensitive materials, involving a series of carefully controlled interventions. The final form emerges in the very act of processing, through which the work with the material acquires a performative character. The precision of craftsmanship and the quality of execution confirm Lala Raščić's technical virtuosity and her confident command of different media.

The work is conceived in direct relation to the architectural heritage and the space of Casa Jagoda Buić in Venice—Jagoda's final residence—which opens as an exhibition space for the first time with this presentation. The presence of Jagoda's works in this environment functions not merely as an institutional framework, but as an open dialogue between two poetics and two distinct artistic styles: three-dimensional textile structures on one side, and fragmented, reflective forms on the other. In this interaction, the exhibition becomes a meeting point of different artistic media, styles and temporal layers, where meanings are constantly re-established.

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