

## Nataša Katalina – Gen Z

Nataša Katalina was born in 1977 as a member of Generation X in Belgrade. Belgrade, as Nataša Katalina herself states, was a resilient city, and the people who grew up there are resilient too. From 1944 to 1991, Belgrade was both the capital of the non-aligned socialist Yugoslavia and a part of the Republic of Serbia. The atmosphere in the 1990s was tumultuous and tense. The artist experienced the time of violent transformation of the country in which she was born. "Bure Baruta" (Powder Keg), as director Goran Paskaljević describes the intense situation in his eponymous film about the evening before the Dayton Agreement, which ended the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1995 after three and a half years, encapsulates this in a word.

Nataša Katalina had the opportunity to engage with art, her creativity, and the possibility of a good education at the Faculty of Applied Arts at the University of Arts in Belgrade, where she also earned her Bachelor's and Master's degree. In 2012, she moved to Vienna; however, the vibrant and inspiring art scene in Belgrade taught her fundamental aspects for her future work as an artist. Where war and destruction touch the most existential parts of our being, the lively life, the tenderness, and the power of beauty are always felt more closely and intensely. This is also what we sense when we look at the works of Nataša Katalina. Vigorous life, contemplation of connections, and sensitive immediacy. Her works require no translation. We stand before them, we see, we feel, when we want to, and we understand when we let ourselves be carried away by them. This is also because the artist does not design her subjects according to trends and the spirit of the times but starts from within herself. This is also true for this series of works about Generation Z.

At some point, she was touched by the special expression of her sleeping daughter, half child, half woman—a liminal being, her own child, yet unfathomably elusive. Nataša Katalina concludes, that her teenage son embodies another generation, portraying him with the gaze of a shy yet demanding deer caught between the threshold, between childhood and young adulthood. His look somewhat reminds us of Vermeer's "Girl with a Pearl Earring." Both artists captured a young person, both mysterious in their own right.

The perspective of young people on the world is different, the artist observes, which is why she symbolically includes an icon in almost every painting to represent a generation of "digital natives." No other generation has been able to observe itself from the outside as Generation Z has, constantly filtered through lenses and camera filters, searching and sometimes finding themselves, uncertain yet brimming with exuberance, which has always been the case. The exhibition addresses a theme that transcends time, engaging people of all eras and cultures.

We have always been aware of the dangers associated with what are known as transitional periods, including adolescence. We all know today that these times bring us closer to life and death, to our very existence, and we also understand that good

forces and companions, as well as spaces of belonging, are needed to face these transitions courageously and with an open mind.

This is where the concept of rites de passage comes into play—transitional rites, as articulated by the French ethnologist Arnold van Gennep in 1909. Van Gennep noted that these transitions are an integral part of social life and are often perceived as potential dangers; therefore, they cannot be undergone individually but must be collectively and ritually navigated. These rituals, which serve to secure the vulnerable state during the transition, include rites such as confirmation, Bar Mitzvah, youth initiation, and graduation. However, many of these rites are often lacking today.

In art, there are numerous examples of engagement with the theme of adolescence and the challenges that accompany it. One can think of Frank Wedekind's "Frühlingserwachen," a tragic play for youth written in 1891, or even earlier, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's "Die Leiden des jungen Werther." The themes presented in these works remain relevant today: nonconformism as a rebellion of feelings, passionate dreams, overflowing, intense lives, deep existential crises, anxieties about existence, self-exploration, mood swings, self-reflection, and extreme vulnerability. All of this can also be found in the works of Nataša Katalina, who approaches these subjects with particular sensitivity.

She never exposes or objectifies young people; instead, respect and wonder are always at the forefront. Each brushstroke conveys affection and thoughtful consideration, layer by layer on the canvas. Her concern is palpable—whether for her own children, those of friends, or for the youth themselves. At the same time, she is constantly reflecting on her own generation.

The works she creates lead back to herself. Nataša Katalina offers us her art, her thoughts, and her feelings. Applying these to our own lives and society can be rewarding—not just for us, but also for future generations, who are equally challenged to navigate the issues of their time. "Every generation unconsciously carries the future and its history within itself," writes the French philosopher Hippolyte Taine. An anonymous person reminds us: "The noblest and most honorable task life imposes on us is to raise the next generation!" Let us take care of this responsibility!

Hopefully, as media analyst Heimito Nollé, a member of Generation X, expresses, our descendants will not follow in our footsteps.

Barbara Mithlinger, Vienna, Dec.2024