

DARJA BAJAGIĆ

In **DARJA BAJAGIĆ'S** work, what you see is not what you get. An image—three women, roughly arranged on a dark background—seems fairly unremarkable at first. As you near it the title appears: *Matching Profiles Murdered & Murderer (Brittany Phillips and Amber Wright)*. Your feeling towards the image shifts from indifference to intrigue.

TEXT BY CHARLOTTE JANSEN



PHOTOGRAPH BY JOACHIM SCHULZ. COURTESY THE ARTIST, ROOM EAST AND CROY NIELSEN



Later, you Google the names and find that Brittany Phillips (the girl smiling on the left) was raped and strangled in 2004, aged 18. Her murder remains unsolved. Amber Wright, meanwhile, the solemn redhead on the right, was convicted aged 15 for the brutal murder of her ex-boyfriend Seath Jackson, also aged 15, following a Facebook spat in 2011. Suddenly what you notice in the image is a superfluity of hands—whose did what deed?

It's grisly stuff from deep in the darkness of a generation net-fed youth—and Darja Bajagić, who raised herself on porn channels, creating fake profiles from pre-adolescence, is familiar with this kind of information. But it's not the brutality or the desperation of

these crimes and sex acts, but the way that we consume them, that Bajagić puts in the foreground—not to discuss the morality of that consumption (she is already tired of talking about the controversial aspects surrounding her work and she doesn't engage with any questions I put forward that suggest conservative mores: for example, how would these women feel about their images being appropriated?) but she insists on re-creating the visceral reactions we have when we encounter images like these, particularly the most extreme.

In this way, Bajagić contributes a unique message to what is probably one of the most useful wider conversations we can have within contemporary culture nowadays:

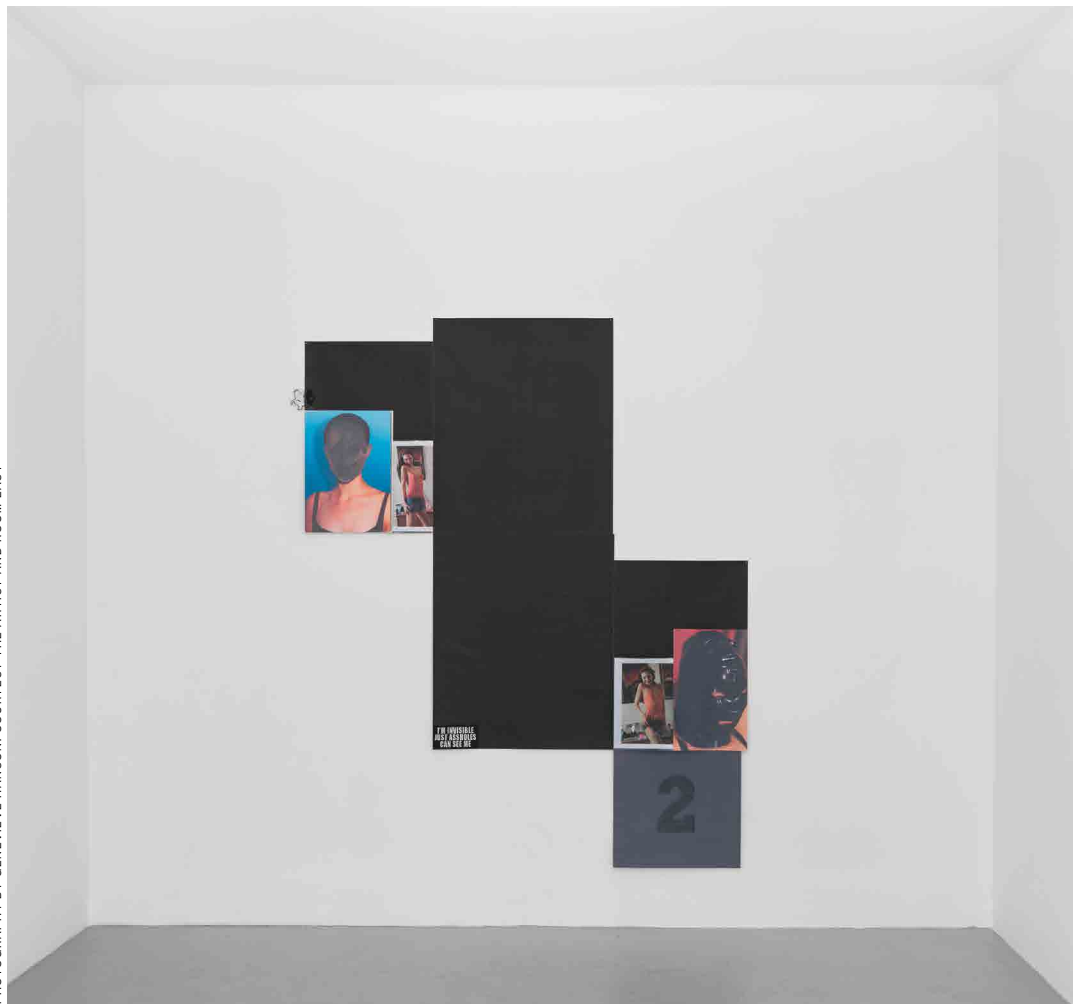
how do we read images? What do we feel when we view them? Where do these reactions come from, and can they ever be transformative?

In a language that mixes high-brow formalism (she studied art at Yale) and DIY messiness (reminiscent of early 2000s internet or amateur porn) her works seem to play a game of hide-and-seek: half-hidden, half-provocative. One thing that is apparent in talking to Bajagić is that she is a steely young woman, resilient enough to push such boundaries.

Could you talk a little about the recent show you had at Croy Nielsen Berlin, alongside Aleksander Hardashnikov? I made a series of paintings, and two

sculptures: the paintings are large reproductions of collages that focused on two girls, Amy Fitzpatrick, a missing person, and Rachel Barber, a homicide victim. Most of the paintings focus on either Amy or Rachel, but one (*Hate Reports, Hate Handwriting, Hate School, Hate Teachers, Hate Snobby People, Hate SchoolWork, Hate House Music, Hate Keyboard, No Life, I Hate Myself*, 2015) uses both—a selfie of Amy and a friend, together with a journal entry written by Rachel's killer, Caroline Reed Robertson (in it, she lists things she hates, both of herself, and the world).

Images of, or relating to, Amy I collected off of her Facebook Community page, 'HELP US TO FIND AMY FITZPATRICK'. In it, there are



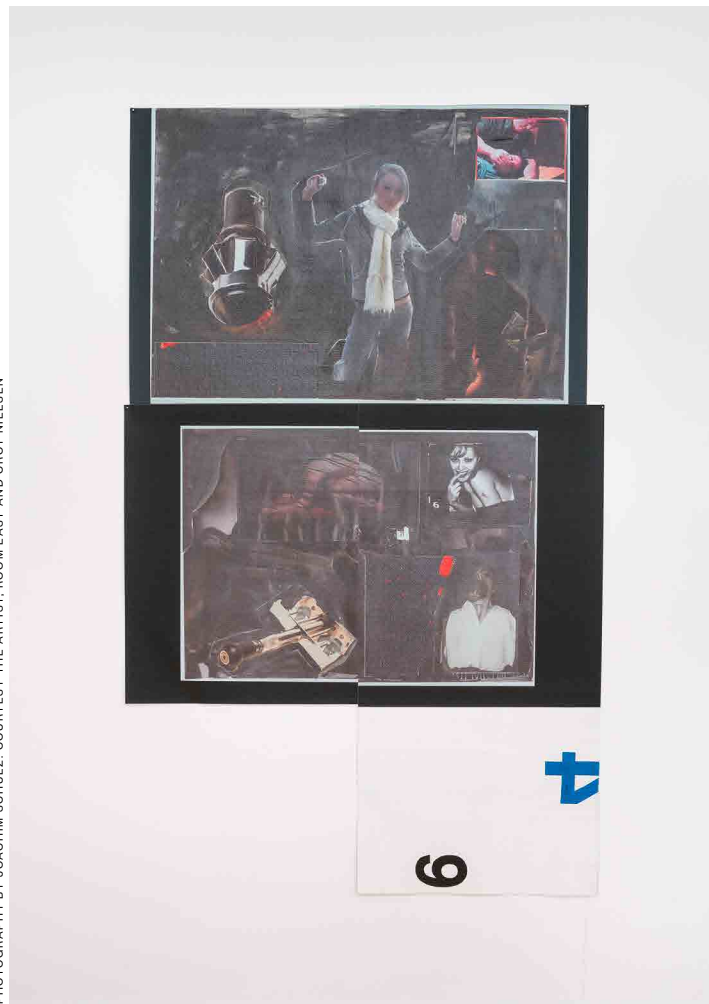
Previous spread, left
Softer Than Stone
And Sick in your Mind
2015
Installation view at Croy Nielsen, Berlin

Previous spread, right
Untitled Collage (Matching Profiles Murdered & Murderer (Brittany Phillips and Amber Wright))
2015

Left
I'm Invisible Only Assholes Can See Me
2014
Installation view from the show *C6ld c6m16rt*

Opposite, left
Amy-Fitzpatrick
2015

Opposite, right
Playboy 43
2015



many photographs of Amy, including selfies of Amy and her friends. And those of Rachel I collected off of her memorial website, as well as online news articles. I target-searched images that were personal, of intimate moments, such as one of Rachel's parents seated, silent at their dining-room table, beneath a framed photograph of their daughter.

Other parts were sourced from message boards, horror-pornography and vampire magazines, and B horror film review magazines.

Why use those images? How does this connect to your idea of presenting a 'blank' image? By wishing to re-present images as 'blanks' (via new arrangements, contexts) I meant wishing for viewers to, at least momentar-

ily, suspend reflexive, fixed judgments, and allow different, new perspectives to arise—not, necessarily, that the images are 'blanks' in themselves. Obviously, there is a tension in this, as sourced images have a past, but it is this tension that I am ultimately after—a forceful reckoning.

This is where formalism lives, as the images waste away into abstraction—you see nothing, like a depression. You lose your moral compass. Nothing means anything. This quote (via PsychCentral), from a depressive woman of 21 years of age, describes it well: 'I feel like I'm floating under an endless gray sky in an endless gray sea of tepid water. There is no horizon. There is nothing to break the monotony. I feel nothing. I see nothing. I hear nothing. I can't bring myself to move.

My world is nothing.'

*You said you're not interested in seeing women from a victimized perspective. So why use women in your work who are victims? They are not always victims—only a few of the most present-day ones are, like the missing persons or homicide victims. (Rachel Barber's mother, Elizabeth Southall, wrote a book, *Perfect Victim*, telling of her family's experience, of Rachel's becoming 'another girl's "perfect" victim. Happy. Beautiful. Talented... (She had everything her killer could want.)*

And although Amy and Rachel are victims of crimes, they are, also, not only this—they had multidimensional lives before they became victims. Of course, I was introduced to their stories because of their

victimhood, but I would not have guessed of their victimhood had I randomly encountered their portraits online. I use the images with the same thought in mind, that viewers will not know, until they know (via the descriptive titles), and this will ignite conflicting feelings.

What interests you about using pornography? What is of interest to me is how it exists, as an alienated thing, hollowed out, drawing in meanings.

I use pornographic images because they ignite, simultaneously, desire and fear. They estrange, but, also, take possession. The same goes for 'violent' images—thinking stops, a new configuration takes its place, and it's pregnant with tensions.

It is not my aim that my works

be pawns in ethical, moral arguments, discussions. The works themselves don't want to communicate totally. They reveal only fragments, and are not ever fully formed. Also, pornography is only a fragment, too, of the other things present—it is not my focus in any way.

My approach is more 'I-simply-look-at-that-and-have-to-deal-with-it'.

*Humour also seems to be an important, perhaps overlooked, element to what you do? It is. It is Thalia and Melpomene. You can't laugh without weeping. An example is *Please Find My Amy*, 2015. Amy [Fitzpatrick] was 15 when she disappeared on New Year's Day, 2008, while on holiday. *Please Find My Amy* depicts Amy*

with a friend, in selfies, found on her Facebook Community page. Amy is puckering her lips, and making a funny 'scary' face.

I'm attracted to sites of simultaneous pleasure and disgust—together, it is a powerful sensation. With pleasure, you're attracted; disgust brings you ambivalence, anxiety or excitement.

My impulse is, often, to use something disgusting, depressive, to embed sites of humour within, around, and, in this way, the conflict emerges; laughter turns it into something ridiculous. Redemptive, pathetic. Horror-pornography.

There's an element of craft in your work (zines, collage, patches). What attracts you to these media? I collect killers' drawings, [used] magazines and patches—these

things are lowbrow, maybe, and are beautiful, artful. They are connected to places, times—arrive with their own histories, meanings.

Collage is how I usually work, as it allows for these fragments to be put together, repositioned to create new meanings, in a new 'dead' body.

And what draws me to minimalism is its sterility, yes—it is clean and dead, and I mean dead in a positive way. It is 'nothing', and you are afforded to think 'nothing' in its sight. Your sensitivity to 'everything', then, is heightened—you perceive details you otherwise wouldn't have, because there is, together, nothing to see and everything to see.

So, I put them together.

Darja Bajagić has a show at Neww Galerie, Paris, until 19 December.