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In Her Majesty's Service

After the Second World War a generation of enthusiasts appeared who wanted to popularize basketball in our country. The Golden Age of our basketball began when Aleksandar Nikolić came to the head of our National team at the beginning of the 60s of the last century. The first medal, the silver one, was won at the European Championship in Belgrade in 1961. Radivoje Korać was the best scorer of the championship. The next four decades saw a unbroken series of successes and basketball as a sport attained religious status in Yugoslavia and Serbia. Our basketball, with its qualities and the number of medals won, joined the ranks of the basketball superpowers of that time the Soviet Union and the USA. Players of our National team became paragons to the young generation and their photos hanging in the rooms of millions of young Yugoslavs were respected as icons. At the same time, numerous coaches and basketball officials did their best to ensure the quality and continuity of the Yugoslav basketball project. At the beginning of the third millennium, they were the ones who inspired Predrag Terzić for a series of works entitled National Service. The great success achieved at that time will probably never be repeated so it can be said that this series of works represents a homage to a successful project that in the best possible way represented the country it came from.

Predrag Terzić's basic procedure is to use documentary photos that are transposed into digital form and then used as samples for paintings. The characteristics of the original photos are abstracted in this process while the objectivity of the digital procedure is used for the final product – an oil on canvas. The photo is evidence that proves the existence of the original, confirms that some event took place and that the portrayed person took part in it. Digital processing reduces this evidence to its basic components vital for the final product, that is, the image that expresses Terzić's perception of the sportsman's "service" in a national basketball project and the sportsman's character that this procedure places in the foreground. Since the sample has become a digital portrait of a basketball player, it is logical that some of the components of the sample are retained. The portraits have retained the pixelization and the flatness of the digital picture and the fusing of the three-dimensional effects of the play of light into a two-dimensional flat surface means the loss of the original source of external light. Fused shadows and big black spots of color thus become contours of a former source of light present on the original photos. Thus, the basic facts about the source of light present in Western painting since the time of the Renaissance are eliminated which is contrary to the Byzantine perception of the emanation of inner light present in the icons and frescos.

In the Byzantine theory of the image, the figurativeness of the icon is the product of similarity and not sameness with its archetype. We can discern the same comparison in Terzić's paintings, since the original contours of the photographed person disappear when digitally processed only so the 'real' image of the person would slowly appear. It is a process similar to the one Gilles Deleuze in his monograph on Francis Bacon "The Logic of Sensation" called figural, the one that creates a figure in contrast to the classical figurative painting that mimetically imitates its model from the real world. According to Deleuze in *Modernity* the Aristotelian principal of mimesis, the imitation of phenomenon from the real world, is invalidated. Thus, in order to go back to representing a figure, the painter must liberate his subject matter from figurative meaning, that is, free the figure from the formal elements of figurative painting. According to Deleuze this is best seen in Bacon's portraits. By executing a special 'reconcentration' of his characters-models, Francis Bacon manages to move away from the mimetic tradition of the portrait genre: "I wish to distort the memory of the portrayed

so it has little bearing to its appearance, but also go back in my distortion as to record the phenomenon.” By doing so he attempts to create not realistic but real, actual figures.

According to Deleuze there are two ways that contemporary painting can avoid figuration: the first is to choose pure form through abstraction and the other is to choose the pure figural by isolating elements of the composition. Deleuze thinks that this form of isolation is the “simplest method, essential, but not sufficient for the painting to move away from representation, to disrupt narration, escape from illustration, to liberate the figure: to ‘stick to the facts’. The ratio between the figure and the space that isolates it defines the ‘fact’. Thus an isolated figure becomes an icon”. This iconicity is the basis characteristic of Terzić’s procedure. By reducing the formal elements of National service the authentic document (photography) the final product is created – the image, that is, the icon.” Terzić connects the process of deconstructing the figurative with the iconicity of the represented image in the Byzantine sense that brings about the appearance of the figure as an iconic object, that is, an admired representation of an individual in a modern world. Thus, the elements of the basketball project are visually presented as a sport with a religious status and Terzić’s painting represent the emanation of the key elements in basketball as a sport with religious status in Yugoslavia and Serbia.

The constant combination of static and dynamic principles characteristic for most of the team sports enables us to see basketball as a complex sport where every individual player is essential for the functioning of the team. There is a dominant relationship between the portrayed person and the observer in the portraits of Nebojša Popović, Radomir Šaper, Ranko Žeravica, Zoran Slavnić Moka, Trajko Rajković, Aleksandar Gec and Borislav Stanković. These players, coaches and officials set in classical portrait poses testify to their important position in basketball in Yugoslavia and Serbia. Taken out of the context of a game or posing in front of the camera the context of the original photos is erased and their portraits become real representations of a timeless moment. Apart from the classical portrait poses we also see coaches who control the present situation on the basketball court, constantly combining the principles of statics and dynamics. Thus, Professor Aleksandar Nikolić is sitting on the bench, thinking about and analyzing the current situation on the court, Bogdan Tanjević and Svetislav Pešić pose as coach-generals on the court, Želimir Želkjo Obradović nervously looks at the semaphore, Vlada Divac celebrates a well executed shot that ‘elevates the spirits’ of the team and Dušan Duda Ivković energetically gives out orders at the court. The dynamics of the basketball game is represented in the portraits of basketball players most often caught in characteristic motions whose result is scoring a point, whether it shows shooting, passing or dribbling. Radivoje Korać Žučko shoots free throws, Aleksandar Saša Đorđević prepares to shoot free throws, Dražen Dalipagić Praja is shown in a high jump shot, Dejan Bodiroga is in the first position ready to start dribbling, crossover dribbling or a jump shot, Dragan Kićanović Kića is dribbling but at the same time observing the situation on the court, Predrag Saša Danilović begins a double step, Ljubodrag Duci Simonović starts dribbling and Vilmoš Loci is in a dribbling-transition. Each of the represented basketball players, coaches and officials constitute a part of the philosophy that has made the Yugoslav-Serbian basketball dynasty. It was their temperament, the style in which they played or how the team was managed that contributed to the realization of this philosophy of game. Their original photos show an awareness of the individual and their character within the spirit of the game and within the time the photos were taken. Roland Barthes defines the psychological dimension of photography as “the performance of me-myself as someone else: the unnatural separation of awareness from identity”. Terzić abstracts this psychological dimension, present at the mentioned documentary photos, with the intention to visually present both his perception of

the portrayed person's role and the basketball project in former Yugoslavia. In its essence his procedure is fauvist, the colored surface is clearly defined, separated by broad black lines. The end result of this procedure is to depersonalize the line that becomes a set of black pixels which moves the signifier from the level of the iconic to the level of presenting Terzić's attitude towards the portrayed person.

Twenty one legends of Yugoslav and Serbian basketball are presented. Their overall contribution was crucial for basketball to become the most popular and most trophy winning sport in our country. Now these outstanding men gaze at us from Predrag Terzić' paintings which by their very presentation – each painting is separated from the frame by a screen-like space – become screen-like projections with an already imposed awareness of how significant each individual is. Behind each one of them there is an emission of light that can be called the emanation of the mission of doing “national service” in basketball and its decades long history of success at the European Championships, World championships and the Olympic Games. This iconicity of Terzić's figures presents a visual representation of the philosophy of basketball which has always been the best ambassador of this country.