



# HRVOJE SLOVENC

safe word

**ANDREA BLANCH:** *How did the Home Theater series come about?*

**HRVOJE SOVENC:** When I moved to the United States, I started to notice the ways that our everyday lives are constructed — almost like a script or a play. I only began to notice this after I moved from Croatia because everything seemed so weird. When I was back home, everything appeared natural because I had grown up there. But after I moved, I began noticing these little things, these masks that people put on. It was the constructed aspects of life that I wanted to put into my images, but it wasn't easy. I tried many things with little luck until one day I came across an ad on Craigslist posted by a dominatrix who was looking for a photographer to take pictures of her so that she could advertise on her website. I was never in touch with that world prior to setting up this shoot, so I didn't really know what to expect. When I showed up at her apartment, she had just finished making pancakes and the pan was still on her stove. On the other side of the apartment, there was a closet full of cleaning supplies that she would have her clients use to scrub her floors. The contrast of the two was super interesting to me. I wondered if I put the part of her apartment that was designed for the pleasure of her clients in the same image as the objects of everyday life, if the the stove would begin to look constructed. It all looked like a stage to me. So I began seeking out people who were engaging in S&M activities in order to compare the spaces they used for living with the spaces that they used for pleasure with the hopes that the domestic space would look like constructed spaces as well.

**AB:** *Did you participate in S&M too?*

**HS:** No. When I first started, I was a little bit afraid—I didn't know what to expect. When I visited the first apartment, I gave the address where I was going to a friend and told him that if I didn't get in touch in an hour or so to come look for me.

Although I never directly participated, I think some of the people were skeptical that I was just a photographer. In order to create the images I would have to return to the spaces at least once after shooting. I would photograph one part of the room, develop and print the images, and then return to photograph the second part. I think that some of them thought that adopting the role of photographer was my way of trying to dominate them. It became like a game.

**AB:** *What was the most difficult part of the project?*

**HS:** The most difficult part of *Home Theater* was creating images in a way that wouldn't come off as too formulaic. I wanted every scene to be fresh and new. I tried to instill an element of ambiguity. I wanted to show that even the spaces that we design for our own private relaxation are like stages wherein we are the protagonists playing our roles.

**AB:** *What was the most interesting object that didn't make it into the series?*

**HS:** When you look through the series, there is a red interior that shows an armchair in one image and a blank wall in the other. In the middle of the room there was a swing just hanging from the ceiling. It was so amazing because it was right there in the middle of the living room. On one wall there were family pictures: mom, dad, and the kids. Then this swing. It was so majestic in that space. In the end I decided to leave it out in order to keep the spaces more ambiguous. I like the emptiness of the resulting images.



Hrvoje Slovinc. Top: *Untitled X (It's a girl)*, Marble Hill, Chapter I: Home Theater (2010).



Bottom: *Untitled XII (Hand Sanitizer)*, Marble Hill, Chapter I: Home Theater (2010)

**AB:** *What prompted you to present your work on multiple panels?*

**HS:** At first I was going present each piece as one long print.

**AB:** *Like a panoramic.*

**HS:** Yes, but as soon as I began doing that the work seemed too constructed. I felt like I was losing a sense of the real. I wanted to split up the domestic and S&M spaces while keeping a format that was natural to photography. So the panels are full frames.

**AB:** *There is an absence of people and intimacy in the series.*

**HS:** I was not interested in people at all. I didn't want the project to be about the S&M people. The only image that has a person in it shows a man from behind. I think this lack of intimacy does speak of intimacy – from a distance. I'm trying to express something by doing the opposite: an absence of intimacy in order to express intimacy.

**AB:** *What is it about the spaces of others that attracts you?*

**HS:** It's like you are going into someone's private temple. The aura of the space, the objects that they have, the smell, everything about it really excites me as an artist.

**AB:** *So what do you think of the space you are in right now?*

**HS:** It reminds me of my own! I think that when people come over they might think that everything is a mess but I know exactly where each thing is...Most of the time.

**AB:** *You did your MFA work at Yale. How did that program influence your practice?*

**HS:** Todd Papageorge was the chair while I was at Yale. He taught me the valuable lesson that nobody is going to care about what you are trying to do if the images are not striking enough for them to look at first. The first step is to figure out what kind of photographer you are. It is easy to fall into the trap of trying to create images to please other people – especially when you are surrounded by people who you admire. So the push was to admit what kind of photographer I was, and then create the best possible images with this



in mind. They definitely do not take your hand. They try to break you down. So they are slapping you left and right hoping that you are going to get on your feet and do the work that you have to do.

**AB:** *Do you think that grad school is important for young photographers?*

**HS:** Absolutely, but at the right time. I was 25 or 26 when I started doing photography. I did biochemistry before that. By the time I started grad school I was in my early thirties and it was the right time. I was ready to experiment with my photography and I think that is one of the most important aspects of grad school. You have to set aside what you think you know in order to experiment and fail and pick yourself back up.

**AB:** *How has your work changed since you left Yale?*

**HS:** It is always evolving. With each project I try to learn a different visual language. So for example, *Home Theater* was one of my first projects using color in a meaningful way. As soon as I finished it, I immediately switched to black and white and began focusing on people. So I am always challenging myself.

**AB:** *So tell us a little bit about your next project.*

**HS:** I'm working in Croatia on a project that looks at the way that society is changing over there. It is one of the few places that I know of where I think the younger generations are more conservative than the older ones. So I am working through ways to show this without being too direct or too obvious. I want it to be open and ambiguous, but still give a feeling to viewers that something is not quite right.

**AB:** *How would you describe yourself in three words?*

**HS:** Risk-taker. Impulsive. Loyal.

**AB:** *If you were not a photographer what would you be?*

**HS:** I would be a tour guide maybe. I would write travel books. I adore travel and changing environments.

**AB:** *What would your daily ritual be?*

**HS:** Coffee. But in general when I feel like I am falling into a mold I try to break that.



Hrvoje Slovinc. Top: *Untitled 1 (October Bliss)*, Marble Hill, Chapter I: *Home Theater* (2010).



Hrvoje Slovinc. Top: *Untitled XI (Home Theater)*, Marble Hill, Chapter I: Home Theater (2010).



Bottom: *Untitled VII (Camp Verde)*, Marble Hill, Chapter I: Home Theater (2010)