

The Belgrade Raw photography collective, founded in 2009, is making its long-awaited Slovenian debut at Photon Gallery. Currently composed of eleven members—Andrej Filev, Jelena Mijić, Aleksandra Mihajlović, Jelena Nikolić, Milovan Milenković, Nemanja Knežević, Luka Knežević-Strika, Mane Radmanović, Dušan Rajić, Darko Stanimirović, and Saša Trifunović—the collective has become known for its raw, direct approach to capturing everyday urban life, pushing beyond the conventions of classic documentary photography. At the gallery, they present the exhibition *The Longer I Look, the Dumber It Seems*, which encapsulates fifteen years of their collaborative exploration of photography and the city of Belgrade.

From the very beginning, their approach has been inherently collective. Photography is not seen as an individual pursuit, but as the product of dialogue, exchange, and collaborative process among the members. In their work, Belgrade Raw does not seek the traditional “decisive moment” in photography; instead, they focus on moments that accumulate, overlap, and evolve over time. Their pace is deliberately slow, often standing in contrast to the rapid tempo of contemporary visual production. For the group, collectivity is not only a method, it is also a central element of the work itself. The photographs carry the spirit of shared experience and convey the sense that life in the city is communal, sometimes conflictual, often banal, yet always imbued with meaning.

At the exhibition in Ljubljana, the collective turns its focus inward, questioning its own creative process. Rather than presenting complete photographic cycles, visitors encounter fragments, drafts, archival materials, and sketches. The works on display do not convey finished narratives; instead, they function as open records, sometimes notes, at times seemingly random snapshots. In dialogue with the texts of Jelena Nikolić, who joined the collective in 2025, these images acquire additional layers of meaning. Her writings, often composed in a stream-of-consciousness style, create a parallel narrative that brings intimacy to the photographs. Together, the visual and the verbal form a language in which each complements the other while also probing the limits of expression—what can be conveyed through photography and what cannot, and vice versa. This presentation highlights a defining aspect of their practice: experimentation, a principle that has been central to Belgrade Raw from the very beginning.

In addition to experimentation, the very name of the collective »Belgrade Raw« evokes a rawness that is central to their aesthetic. This rawness is not about brutality, but about directness: revealing what is often overlooked like marginal spaces, fleeting interactions, mundane tasks, and scenes easily lost in the city’s hustle and bustle. Their approach stands in stark contrast to conventional depictions of Belgrade. While tourist and media images often present the city as an idealized backdrop, the collective seeks its true image, embracing contradictions and, at times, the grotesque beauty of the urban environment.

Despite the apparent spontaneity of the collective's photographic style, their exhibitions are always underpinned by carefully considered spatial arrangements, as is the case at the Photon Gallery. In these thoughtfully designed contexts, photographs are not seen as isolated objects but as elements of space. Within comprehensive installations, they combine with other images, texts, and the exhibition space itself to convey a cohesive message. The result is a series of site-specific installations that transcend the traditional boundaries of photography, opening the medium toward a form of spatial collage. Each exhibition also presents a distinct interpretation of the depicted "reality," where the same works and texts can generate new meanings through different spatial constellations and modes of presentation.

The photographs and texts in the Belgrade Raw exhibition present two complementary dimensions of city life and everyday experience. The photographs serve as the exterior, representing the streets, the city, and its marginal spaces, while the texts reveal the interior—the thoughts, feelings, and reflections of the individual, as written by Jelena Nikolić.

The exhibition title, *The longer I look the dumber it seems*, is not meant as provocation but as an invitation to slow down and observe with persistence. Through this sustained observation, the absurd and sometimes illogical nature of reality comes to light. The "dumbness" revealed is not derogatory; it is liberating, freeing both photography and the viewer from the need for meaning, correctness, or definitive interpretation. In this way, the title encapsulates the essence of the collective's approach: experimentation without rules, documentation without embellishment, and beauty that exists simply because reality is what it is.

The exhibition at Photon Gallery is therefore more than a presentation of the collective to a Slovenian audience, it is an invitation to a slow, attentive way of seeing the world around us. Also, a way of seeing that acknowledges an image as an approximation rather than a whole, that finds beauty not in aestheticization but in reality itself, and that recognizes freedom in "dumbness" in the refusal of one dimensional meaning, allowing each visitor to generate their own interpretation.

Text by Špela Pipan