

LJILJANA KOLEŠNIK

Conflicting Visions of Modernity
and the Post-war Modern Art



In the political and cultural sense, the period between the end of World War II and the early seventies was undoubtedly one of the most dynamic and complex episodes in the recent world history. Thanks to the general enthusiasm of the post-war modernisation and endless faith in science and technology, it generated the modern urban (post)industrial society of the second half of the 20th century. Given the degree and scope of wartime destruction, positive impacts of the modernisation process, which truly began only after Marshall's plan was adopted in 1947, were most evident on the European continent. Due to hard work, creativity and readiness of all classes to contribute to building of a new society in the early post-war period, the strenuous phase of reconstruction in most European countries was over in the mid-fifties. New industrial and communication infrastructure was built, the rapid development of industrial production instigated the growth of new urban centres, and new technologies generated a need for new knowledge and stimulated investment in raising the general level of citizens' education. New cultural needs arose, as well as new notions of the modern lifestyle through an increase in material production, greater availability of consumer goods, and growth of personal standard of living. In shaping those needs, architecture and design played the main role. Unlike the pre-war situation and thanks to the perception of design as a creative sphere endowed with enormous responsibility for the general democratisation of the society, visual and aesthetic concepts of high art penetrated much faster into the field of mass industrial production, reached wide consumer circles more easily, changed the parameters of taste, and influenced the collective image of modernity.

Even though from the aspect of social priorities architecture, urban planning and product design were undoubted "vehicles" of modernization processes after World War II, other "plastic" arts (painting, sculpture, graphic arts) and critical discourse accompanying them were the ones to thank for the acknowledgment of the ideas of universalism and internationalism as fundamental determinants of the post-war modernist culture. Both categories – inextricably connected with the phenomenon of abstract art – became the symbolic character of "the free world". However, in the complex post-war situation, the rhythm and flow of adopting the universalising notion of modernity and modernism depended on a series of cultural, social and political circumstances and was different in every European country. In Yugoslav circumstances it could be defined as a process of modernist reconstruction determined by rather clear (political) expectations. In that respect, the appearance and adoption of abstract art on the Yugoslav cultural scene was not only a response to the local environment's need for "modernisation" of art production, but also a confirmation of its actual detachment from the totalitarian doctrine of socialist realism and its inclination towards the kind of cultural policy that would bring the Yugoslav society closer to the ethos of the "free world" through the acceptance of the said symbolical notion of abstraction. Intertwining of political and inherently artistic motives emerging from a series of events on the local art scene was a situation encountered all across Europe in the late forties and early fifties (except in the Eastern Bloc countries). A common trait of these situations are numerous and often ardent debates about the social role of modern art, which significantly redefined the concept of internationalism and the universalism of its expressive means, compelling every community to take a separate stand towards the conditions of the (hypothetical) ideological conflict between geometrical and gestural abstraction,¹ the only two visual options and two different visions of modernity which were at the time truly relevant in Europe.

The rationalist vision of modernity, whose advocates belligerently and arduously promoted the idea of collective progress and the utopian prospect of the social mission of art by referring to the programmatic determinants of interwar avant-garde's constructive wing, and insisting on the importance of the collective, contradicted the true and lived reality

of the post-war Yugoslav society. In the mid-fifties this heroic role of the collective – as it was defined in the early post-war period – started to change and at the end of the decade it was openly challenged by re-evaluated notion of (creative) individuality. Heroism was now bestowed on the individual artistic gesture and a there emerged a completely different type of abstract art that which proved to be much closer to the system of values of the consumer society. Almost mythical projection of individualism as its mainstay and gestural abstraction offered the concept of art as an autonomous field of reality framing the artist's everyday 'struggle' to finding means of expression and design methods that give the possibility of releasing profoundly unconscious, archetypal layers of the human psyche and facing with otherwise unspeakable aspects of the post-war world reality by. The poetic determinants (ideology) of such modernism – ranging from abstract expressionism and lyrical abstraction to all varieties of Informal Art's pictorial current – were in mid 1950s' acknowledged as a positive developments within the realm of visual arts and already at the end of the decade described and celebrated as authentic torchbearers of modernity on the Yugoslav arts scene.

However, a prerequisite for any debate about formal (ideological) options in modern art was – in the Yugoslav case – damage remedy through adopting the socialist realism doctrine in 1946 and launching art production based on the new cultural policy. The reconstruction of modernism we are discussing ended on the Croatian art scene in the mid-fifties with a reconstruction of the expressive means of modern art through overcoming of the initial resistance towards abstraction and establishing an essentially important relationship of mutual trust between art criticism and modern art. The state of things on the Croatian art scene as a result of that process was truly quite interesting. In addition to moderate modernism in the works of artists active also in the interwar period and the existential realism of Buffetian origin, there were also examples of assimilation Picasso's post-war painting, geometric abstraction emerging from close personal contacts with the Parisian art scene and drawing upon the tradition of the pre-war avant-garde, as well as the first displays of gestural abstraction, which already in 1956/1957 would result in diverse varieties of Informal Art. The advent of abstraction was accompanied by new terminology and a new type of interpretative discourse that depicted and explained the stylistic devices of abstract art as a universal international language of modern visual culture and the only true expression of *modernity* in the post-war world. Its manifestations in art production, in terms of both meaning and axiology, were fully followed the pertaining vision of modernity. They did not appear in hybrid, but in stylistically "purebred" forms, surrounded by almost the same kind of debates as in other European communities. Therefore, they operated as constituent parts of the global culture of modernism in the Croatian/Yugoslav cultural space.

When we say stylistic purity, we primarily mean the compatibility of this art with a complex of concepts and techniques that claimed a right to modernity from 1950 to the late sixties, and could be encountered in diverse forms in all the post-war societies. The individual characteristics of these concepts' realisations are a consequence of the already mentioned need of each environment to find its own answers to basic preconditions and requirements of the modernisation processes, which define the social, political and economic framework of cultural production, both locally and globally. In the local context, the said preconditions were defined by the experimental, modernist nature of the political project called self-governing socialism. They were manifested primarily as art's attempt at using its own expressive means to articulate different aspects of the collective experience of modernity. Their scope defined the art production of the period as hegemonic and critical, rational and self-reflexive, centralised and polycentric at the same time, therefore in terms describing the internal tensions of the global modernist culture as well, which

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Opening of the
exhibition *Salon 54*,
Art Gallery Rijeka,
March 1954

Museum of Modern and
Contemporary Art
Photo-Archives, Rijeka



makes the expression "socialist modernism", used ever more frequently to describe the art of the fifties and sixties in Yugoslavia, quite problematic, to say the least. Due to the very same reasons, the label of "socialist aestheticism" is also problematic, since it is being used more and more frequently as a synonym for "socialist modernism" and applied on the same art phenomena, regardless of the fact that they functioned differently in different Yugoslav environments and had a different historical genealogy.

The described differences are a consequence of the fact that even after the establishment of socialism, national cultures within the Yugoslav Federation continued to develop to their own inherent rhythms. Such cultural policy, defined after the split with the USSR, took into account the fact that neither before nor after the establishment of a new state it was possible to define a group of art practices "built on mutual tradition, identical formal and substantial hypotheses or common aesthetical and poetic starting points",² whose internal reorganisation would form a system of historical references and would – without particular political pressure – serve as a common starting point of the post-war modernism. However, while the term "Yugoslav art" is an empty signifier, the phrase "**Yugoslav art scene**" points to a series of art phenomena loosely connected with a certain understanding of modernity, which had a normative value within the Yugoslav cultural circle all until the late sixties. It was based on the identical institutional structure and identical experience in relations with the centres of political power which – in accordance with the dominant cultural policy – guaranteed a social framework for production, reception and evaluation of art on the entire state territory. Uniform, rigid and uncritically taken over from the USSR in the early post-war years, this institutional structure – especially in the early fifties – greatly aggravated and postponed the solution of the most important issues in art production, becoming the pivotal figure of the constant fierce resistance against the progressive circles' activities on the Yugoslav cultural scene. However, resistance towards narrow-mindedness and socialist-realist mentality, the mainstay of such institutional framework, generated in the case of Croatia a socially responsible and highly professional art criticism, which assumed a heroic role in ensuring the basic (theoretical and cultural) prerequisites for unhindered exploration of and experimenting with different visual and poetic options from the context of high modernism. One of



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View of the
exhibition *Salon*
54, (contempo-
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Rijeka 1954

Museum of Modern
and Contemporary
Art Photo-archives,
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these prerequisites was defining the relations with the local modernist tradition, its reorganisation and finding of poetic and ideological footholds of post-war art. The key role in the achievement of this was played by the *Salon 54* exhibition, opened in March 1954 at the Fine Art Gallery in Rijeka.

It attempted to juxtapose selected pieces of both pre-war and post-war art and thus shed light on the crucial and vital connections between these two segments of modern art and in that way to complete the process of reconstruction of modernism in the Yugoslav cultural environment. The fact that only critics from Croatia (Dimitrije Bašičević, Radoslav Putar, Boris Vižintin), Serbia (Katarina Ambrozić), and Slovenia (France Šijanec) participated in the organisation of this exhibition was an unbiased image of the conditions on the Yugoslav art scene of the moment, since the art of other republics was still dominated by the "hard-lined" realism of socialist-realist origin. Thanks to such display concept of the *Salon*, the historical genealogy of all the art phenomena on which Yugoslav culture founded its detachment from the socialist-realist doctrine in the field of visual art became quite clear. In Croatian art, this role was played by the geometric abstraction of EXAT 51, the innovative impetus of a group of modern sculptors (Vojin Bakić, Dušan Džamonja, Kosta Angeli Radovani, Ivan Kožarić), Oton Gliha's synthetic painting, and the surrealist experiment of Ivo Dulčić, as well as by a step towards a freer painting gesture of Edo Murtić, whose works were not displayed at this exhibition in accordance with his own wish. In that sense, Serbian art prominently featured the painting of Mića Popović, Peđa Milosavljević, and Miodrag Protić, a somewhat more daring and imposing expressionism of Milan Konjović and Petar Lubarda, and Petar Omčikus's abstraction, who was – just like Stane Kregar and Veno Pilon in Slovenia or EXAT 51 in Croatia – at that time a direct connection between national art and the European (French) art scene. Different directions in the reorganisation of modernist tradition, marked by *Salon 54*, resulted also in differences in the poetic configuration of Croatian, Serbian and Slovenian art in the upcoming decades, due to which – for instance – EXAT's neo-constructivism and somewhat later New Tendencies had almost no impact on Serbian and Slovenian art, while the influence of the "Paris School", recognizable in these circles, was almost negligible in Croatian art.

Ivan Picelj,
Composition XL,
1952

Museum of
Contemporary Art,
Zagreb



Salon 54, as an example of an important and groundbreaking intervention of art criticism into post-war art, could hardly happen in other Yugoslav environments for a simple reason that – all until the late fifties – "the normative level of art criticism" there was "way below the normative level of art itself".³ One of the key reasons for a different situation in Croatia were the activities of the Department of Art History at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb,⁴ established in 1876. In the interwar period it produced a stable community of professional art critics and museum curators, active in the second half of the century as well. In the post-war period they were joined by the same group of young and educated art historians that would display *Salon 54*, determinedly and steadfastly support abstraction and through regular daily newspaper articles systematically expound contemporary art events. In the wake of socialism's enlightening character, this group of art critics – primarily Radoslav Putar and Dimitrije Bašičević – would develop close collaboration with artists. As the main objective of their (activist) pursuits they would be raising the general level of visual culture and creating modern art public.

Edo Murtić,
Manhattan,
1952

Museum of
Contemporary Art,
Zagreb



Peđa
Milosavljević,
Galic Rooster,
1952

Museum of Modern
and Contemporary
Art, Rijeka



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Stane Kregar,
Memory of French
Cathedrals,
1953

St. Stanislaw Institute,
 Ljubljana

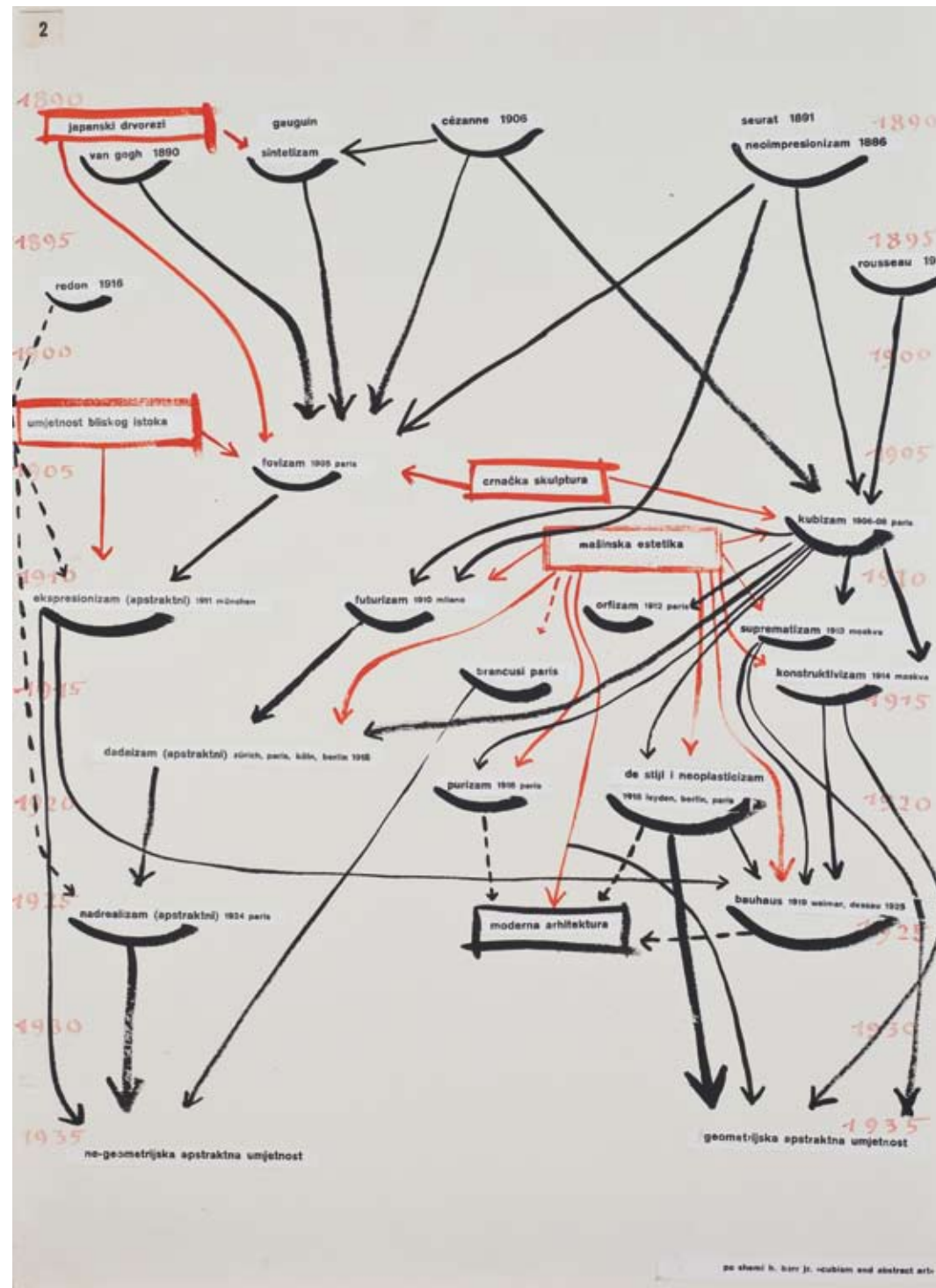


The establishment of abstraction to the position of the dominant visual option on the Yugoslav art scene in the context of the Cold War policy and stabilisation of the Yugoslav position on the international political scene was (politically) undoubtedly a very important and expected outcome of the reconstruction of modernism. However, the mentioned critics and artists did not take an interest in the proclaimed political orientation of government structures, but in actual understanding and incorporation of abstract art in the context of the collective vision of modernity. Out of thus formulated

common goal sprang the *1st Didactic Exhibition: Abstract Art*, the most interesting enlightenment project in the field of fine art in the fifties and a specific example of cultural activism of the time. The exhibition, held/initiated in 1957, was the brainchild of art critic Josip Depolo, a proposition made to the City Gallery of Contemporary Art⁵ to organise an exhibition of screen prints by André Bloc, Edgar Pillet, and Victor Vasarely, borrowed by Depolo himself from the holdings of the Parisian Gallery Denise René and brought to Zagreb.⁶ While considering Depolo's proposition, a conclusion was reached that French artists' prints might serve as an illustration of a wholesome story about the development of abstract art, whose display format should be adapted to the receptive capabilities and viewing habits of an average Yugoslav citizen. In addition to Depolo and the Gallery staff, Vesna Barbić and Edo Kovačević, the creative team of the exhibition was joined by Radoslav Putar, Vjenceslav Richter, Ivan Picelj, Tihana Ravlić, and Neven Šegvić, all members or supporters of the already extinguished group EXAT 51, who played the pivotal role in the realisation of this project. The lack of contemporary theoretical and art historian literature in translation, necessary for the explanation of the fundamental concepts of modern art, as well as the lack of artworks necessary for their demonstration – except the said screen prints and one work by Piet Mondrian, in the meantime borrowed from Belgrade's National Museum – forced the organisers to improvise. Collaging typewritten translations of foreign texts, reproductions from books and magazines, clippings from art magazines, and personal archive photographs helped make 92 cardboard panels of modest dimensions (73 x 50 cm) which comprised the *1st Didactic Exhibition of Abstract Art*. Its narration was based on Alfred H. Barr's hypothesis on abstraction as a logical and inevitable outcome of the development of modern art, and it began with Barr's famous diagram, translated and re-drawn, unknown to the majority of visitors at the time. The interpretation of events on the art scene after 1935, which concluded Barr's narrative, did not defer from its initial postulate; however, in accordance with the rationalist, neo-constructivist vision of modernity it shifted the accent on the idea of synthesis of "plastic arts", on the elaboration of its historical genesis and, finally, on the explanation of reasons why synthesis was the appropriate (if not the only possible) model of participation of art and artists in contemporary life. At the beginning of the said genealogical line there was the ideology and practice of the *Bauhaus*, which interspersed all visual arts with science and contemporary technology. Then there was the portrayal of Le Corbusier's and Gerrit Rietveld's works from the 1930s, a summary representation of the conclusions reached at the post-war meetings of *CIAM* on the subject of the interrelation between architecture, sculpture, and design, and – as a confirmation of the vitality and urgency of the synthesis prerequisite – the programmatic determinants of the French group *Espace* the phenomenon closest, in the chronological sense, to the moment when the *1st Didactic Exhibition of Abstract Art* took place. The prominent position of *Espace* group in the post-war circumstances was also accentuated by translated statements of its founder, sculptor André Bloc, on the synthesis of arts as the only true evidence of the contemporary artists' capabilities to "use their imagination and create a world in which a dream can find its place", i.e. on the "harmonious progress of human activities" as the fundamental goal of contemporary civilisation, unattainable without the involvement of the humanist potential of plastic arts and without their close association with the industry.⁷ Adding to it the explanation of a new structure of relations between "plastic arts", according to which urban design defines the framework, architecture determines and creates the basic prerequisites, and painting and sculpture complete the humanisation of the man's surroundings – with equal participation on the part of science and industry – one might say that this sounds just like the programme of EXAT 51.

I Didactic exhibition: Abstract Art; panel No. 2: Herman Barrs' diagram representing development of modern art, redrawn and translated to Croatian

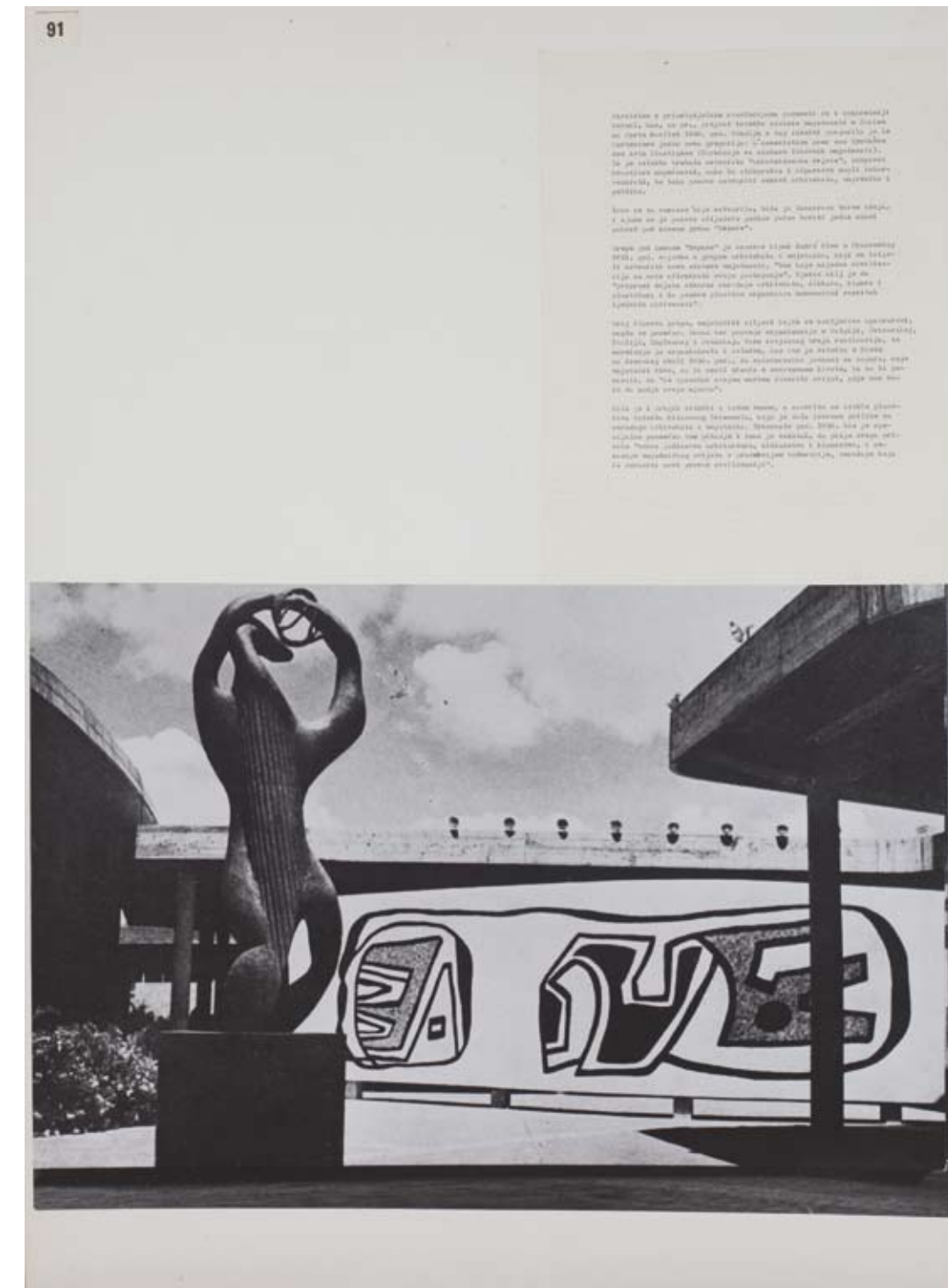
Museum of Contemporary art Archives, Zagreb



Such concept gave other "plastic arts" significantly less space than architecture. As terms relevant for the understanding of contemporary painting, there was geometric abstraction ("pure" painting, oriented towards a harmonious connection between its structural and compositional elements), "non-geometric abstraction" (halfway between geometry and Tachisme, directed towards the revelation of the "internal structure of objects") and Tachisme ("smudge painting" without any structural determinants – "romantic chaos"). However, the used terminology was not precise enough; the term geometric abstraction thus delineated only the post-war painting production related to the institution of *Salon des Réalités Nouvelles* and the activities of the Parisian Gallery Denise René (Edgar Pillet, Richard Mortensen, Alberto Magnelli, Victor Vasarely). The term non-figurative art referred to the "Paris School" (Jean Bazaine, Jean-Paul Riopelle)

I Didactic Exhibition: Abstract Art, panel No. 91: A survey of the post-war exhibitions on the subject of synthesis of arts, stressing the importance of the Art Group Espace. It is illustrated with photograph of the inner courtyard at the University of Caracas (arch. Carlos Raoul Villanueva) decorated by Fernand Légers' mural and Henry Laurens sculpture, 1954

Museum of Contemporary art Archives, Zagreb



and Dubuffet's art brute, while the term Tachisme equally referred to American abstract expressionism (Jackson Pollock) and the wide array of varieties of the French Informal Art (Hans Hartung, Georges Mathieu, Nicolas de Staël). Sculpture representation was even narrower, reduced to only three examples – Max Bill's *Endless Loop* from 1938, Pevsner's sculpture in front of Saarinen's General Motors building in Detroit, and Nicolas Schoffer's *Spatiodynamic Structure* from 1955, also related to the explanation of the notion of contemporary (abstract) sculpture. One particularly interesting thing about the representation of post-war art was the selection of works, which – like Schoffer's – belonged to the current European art production, as well as the extreme focus on French art. The process of Americanisation of European culture, particularly intense in the mid-fifties, had no special influence on the Yugoslav art scene,⁸ in spite of the

I Didactic Exhibition: Abstract Art, panel No. 79: The explanation of term "non-geometric abstraction" illustrated by the reproduction of Hans Hartungs' Painting T-1950-47, 1950

Museum of Contemporary Art Archives, Zagreb



famous exhibition *American Contemporary Art*, held in 1956, which ended its tour of European cities in Belgrade, and the exhibition *Contemporary Lithography in the United States*, displayed in Zagreb and Ljubljana two months earlier. In the wake of this pre-war tradition, local artists continued to follow the Parisian trends with utmost attention even after the war. From the point of view of the Yugoslav art scene, all until the mid-sixties Paris would be the centre of (European) modern art.

Therefore, the concurrence between EXAT 51's programmatic orientation, André Bloc's standpoint, the manner of interpretation, and selection of the material displayed at the *1st Didactic Exhibition* was not a coincidence. It showed that even after their joint actions, the members of this art group still firmly adhered to the working methods and objectives defined

I Didactic Exhibition: Abstract Art, panel No. 86: The explanation of term "contemporary sculpture", illustrated by Nicolas Scahoefler Spatiodynamic Structure, 1955

Museum of Contemporary Art Archives, Zagreb



by their 1951 *Manifesto*. The ten items of this programmatic text presented the fundamental views of EXAT 51 on contemporary art, defined its visual tools, procedures, objectives and ambitions, rejected the "outdated views in the field of fine art" and offered instead a politically aware, socially involved, collective project of new art for a new society. In the wake of the concept of art synthesis, the traditional hierarchy of art types and media was rejected, alongside the difference between "pure" and "applied" art, and the pronounced inclination towards experimental research approach to art form and the process of its making.

The fundamental principles of the Group's programme were developed through spatial organisation projects and design of exhibitions of cultural, educational and industrial achievements that presented Yugoslavia in the early post-war period at a series of

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Aleksandar
Srnc, *Wire
Construction*,
1952

Marinko Sudac
Collection, Zagreb

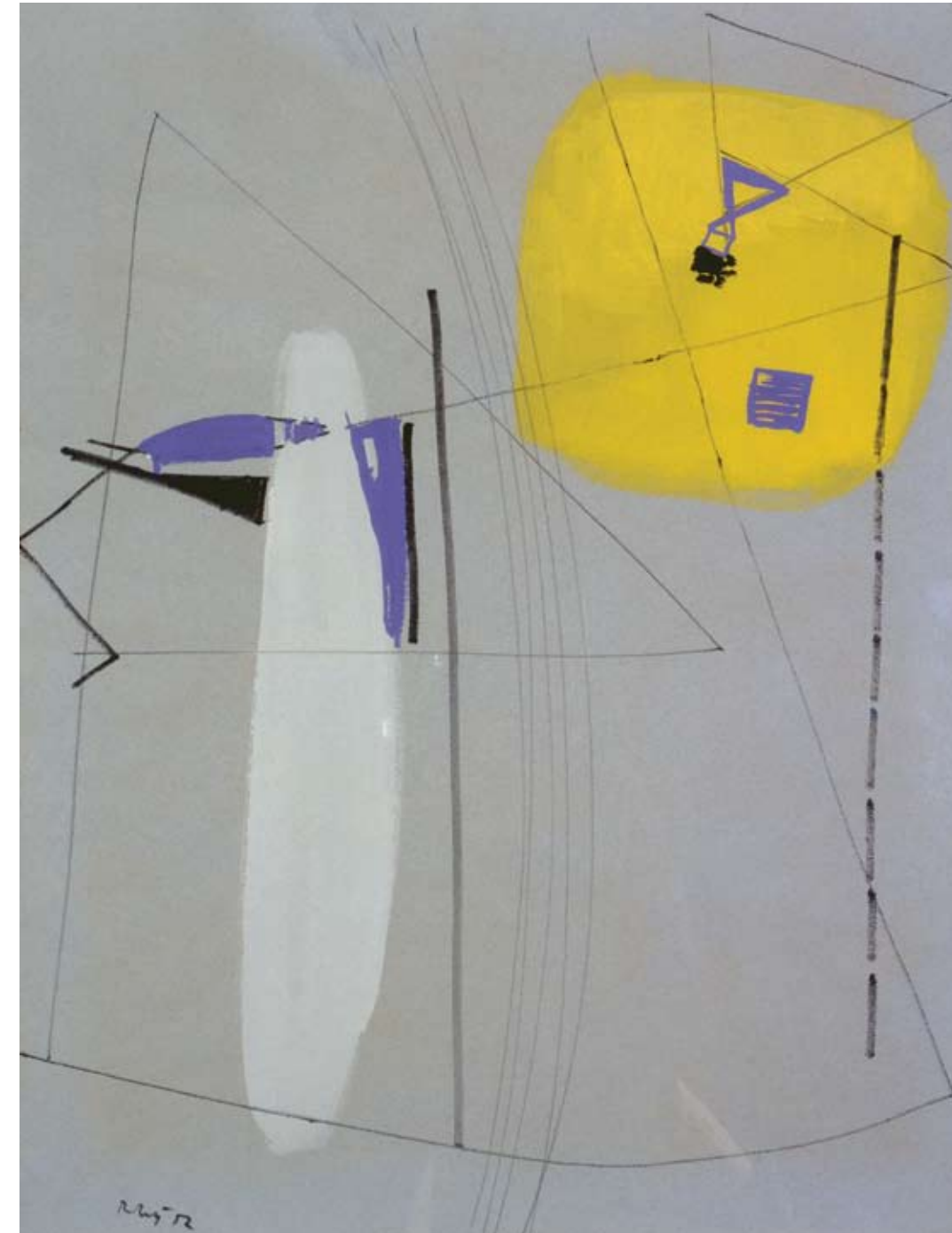


international fairs (Vienna 1949, Stockholm 1949 and 1950, Hanover 1950, Chicago and Paris 1951). The authors of these projects, painters Ivan Picelj and Aleksandar Srnc and architect Vjenceslav Richter would be joined by other signatories of EXAT's *Manifesto* (architects Bernardo Bernardi, Zdravko Bregovac, Zvonimir Radić, Božidar Rašica, and Vladimir Zaharović), attracted by the prospect of a rational, experimental, and exploratory approach to artistic tasks, as well as by the idea of their collective realizations. However, exhibition projects that initiated the advent of EXAT were relatively few, and commissions for complex architectural tasks with a potential for plastic art synthesis gradually ceased. Occasional works on the reconstruction of public facilities' interiors and rare individual projects did not provide a possibility for an integral collective presentation. The burden of promotion and broader presentation of EXAT's conceptual programme was thus transferred to the works of its painters.

The first public appearance of Ivan Picelj, Božidar Rašica, and Aleksandar Srnc in 1952 did not happen on the home turf, but in Paris, at the 7th *Salon des Realites Nouvelles*. EXAT 51 painters (joined in the meantime by Vladimir Kristl) finally presented themselves

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Božidar Rašica,
Composition,
1952

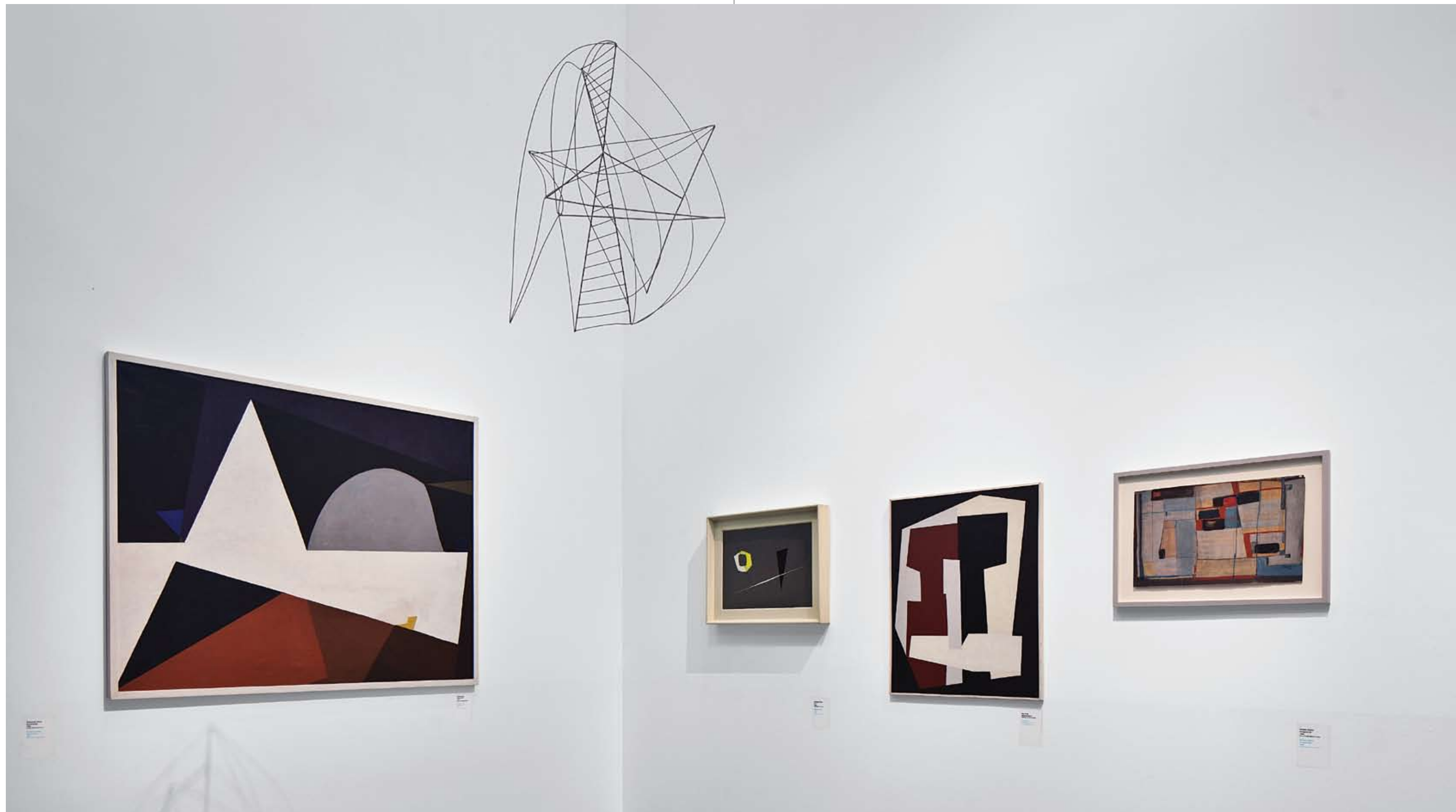
Museum of
Contemporary Art,
Zagreb



to the Croatian public in February 1953. The programmatic character of this first and only exhibition, which presented the Group's painting team in its entirety, was confirmed by Vjenceslav Richter's statement that the displayed works were meant primarily as a "structural part and space modulator", i.e. as "a part of a more complete architectural or plastic-spatial design and a component of 'the synthesis of arts'". Relying on the language of geometric (geometricised) abstraction, the four artists abolished not only the visual practice of socialist realism, but also the entire local modernist tradition. The radicalism of this breakup and its psychological impact derived from the fact that the group of artists presented a new concept of art, a new idea of the artist's social role and new expressive means, as well the fact that they conceded the evaluation of their work to the public instead of political forums.⁹ The consequences of such a decision were much broader than it appeared at first sight. Discussions about the nature of abstract art, about the repercussions of its belated appearance on the Croatian art scene, and

• Painterly production of art group EXAT 51

View of the exhibition *Socialism and Modernity*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb 2011-2012 (photo Paolo Mofardin)



about EXAT's standpoint regarding "our socialist reality" immediately spread on other art phenomena of the time and changed the Croatian art scene for all times. Not even a month after their Zagreb display, the EXAT four exhibited their works at the Gallery of Prints and Drawings Collective in Belgrade. Belgrade's art criticism response was much more positive, but the exhibition left no trace in Serbian art. Neither then, nor in the following decade, Serbian art showed an interest in the concept of synthesis or a socially involved relationship between modern art and reality from the position of EXAT 51 and, somewhat later, *New Tendencies*.

In the years to come Picelj, Srnec and Rašica would exhibit only at important group exhibitions. Participation at the exhibition of *Contemporary Yugoslav Art*, held in July and August 1956 at the occasion of the 8th AICA Congress in Dubrovnik, would be their last gathering and the date when EXAT 51 ceased to exist.

Liberated from the aura of estrangement and heroism that shrouded it in the early fifties, EXAT's painting today seems neither better nor worse than similar contemporary trends in Belgium, Sweden, Denmark or Italy, and it belongs to typical variants of early post-war European geometric abstraction. However, EXAT 51's contribution to post-war art should not be sought in its painting production, but rather in the promotion of socially responsible artistic activities and the connection between art and industry, as well as in the acknowledgment of the emancipation potential of mass culture and abolishing the boundaries between high and applied art. Thanks to these components of EXAT's programme, consistently implemented by its members in their visual practices, the Zagreb art scene made a crucial step towards adopting the fundamental parameters of the global post-war modernist culture. In addition to interior design, stage design, and animated film, EXAT 51 members left an indelible mark on graphic and product design, as well as in the organisation of work in the fields of architecture and design (launch of the *Zagreb Triennale of Applied Art* in 1955; establishment of *Industrial Design Studio* in 1956). They could also be attributed with the "responsibility" for innovative educational concepts, such as the already mentioned *1st Didactic Exhibition of Abstract Art*.

After their presentation in Zagreb, the 92 panel boards were packed in two wooden chests and sent off on a journey across Yugoslavia.¹⁰ In the following five years, the *1st Didactic Exhibition: Abstract Art* toured 15 cities – from Skopje to Maribor – and was attended by thousands of viewers. Unpretentious and close to the popular "wall display" communication format, it generated great interest everywhere and became undoubtedly the most visited art event in the fifties. The exceptional audience turnout could be explained by a fortunate moment of the project realisation, which coincided with the passage of abstraction into art mainstream, i.e. with it becoming a widely accepted (re)presentational pattern of Yugoslav society's modern cultural identity. Numerous other examples of the outbreak of abstraction in everyday life corroborated this claim. It became a synonym for modern urban landscape and modern lifestyle, characterised by geometric sculptural forms of contemporary furniture (Bernardo Bernardi), concise organic forms of ceramic and glassware (Jelena Antolčić, Marta Šibar, Stela Skopal, Raoul Goldoni), fabrics (Jagoda Buić), and decorative objects. Even though good design solutions had a hard time finding their way to mass production all until the mid-sixties, the "plastic environment" of the Yugoslav post-war society rapidly changed, while the issue of the relation between personal and collective standard became one of the most important public discussion issues in the late fifties.

In spite of the activist involvement of its envoys and large number of followers, especially among architects, designers and progressive art critics, the neo-constructivist concept



• Edo Murtić,
*Three White
Lights*,
1965

Goranka Vrus Murtić
Collection, Zagreb



• Andrej Jemec,
Battle,
1960

Modern Gallery,
Ljubljana

• **Presentation of the Yugoslav high modernist art production, 1957 - 1965**

View of the exhibition *Socialism and Modernity*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb 2011-2012 (photo Paolo Mofardin)





- of modern art lost the battle against self-reflexive type of abstraction in the late fifties, which proved to be much closer to the collective notion of what modern art was and what it should look like. The expansion of Informal Art and the affirmation of the concept of autonomous art, alongside the first generation shift after the war and a new type of public discussions about art, resulted in a great change on the Yugoslav art scene.

Miodrag B. Protić,
Composition,
1961
Museum of Modern
and Contemporary
Art, Rijeka

In painting production, this great change was marked by a complete focus on the questioning of the material, procedural and structural aspects of the painting and sculpture media, on the endorsement of individual poetics and individualised treatment of the painting matter, ranging from a spontaneous automatic recording of creative gestures (Edo Murtić, Ferdinand Kulmer, Šime Perić, Rudolf Sablić), "concrete" interventions in the painting matter (Ivo Gattin, Eugen Feller, Božidar Jelinić) and scrupulous painstaking construction of painted surface's amorphous conditions (Boris Dogan), to examples of its organisation through organic and oniric forms (Ordan Petlevski, Biserka Baretić) and varieties of existentialist structural painting which did not cross the borderline of "pure" abstraction (Oton Gliha, Ljubo Ivančić). The mentioned varieties of Informal Art from the context of Croatian art could be encountered – in an equal or somewhat narrower formal range – in all Yugoslav centres and became constituent parts of representative models of art production, which presented socialist Yugoslavia at the most important international modern art exhibitions, travelling exhibitions organised by the Federal Committee for Foreign Cultural Exchange, but also at all other (politically) important art shows, such as *Yugoslav Modern Art*, held in London in 1961.



Starting with the 28th Venice Biennale in 1956, where Yugoslavia for the first time presented itself with high modernist production,¹¹ a group of painters (Murtić, Gliha, Ivančić, Kulmer, Prica, Perić, Protić, Pavlović, Petrović, Srbinović, Bernik, Jemec, Kotnik, Mušič) and sculptors (Džamonja, Bakić, Radovani, Tršar, Tihec, Boljka, Luketić, Jevrić, Jančić, Hadžiboškov, Logo) from all Yugoslav cultural centres became discernible. Their works would regularly be mounted in large international art shows. Even though the selection criteria which resulted in this (or only slightly different) selection of artists were not always strictly professional, from today's point of view it is difficult to find them objectionable, since really the most convincing representatives of high modernism in Yugoslavia were included. Poetic (and ideological) homogeneity of the said representative sample, as well as the entire segment of the abstract art of the period, corroborates the assertion that even in the local environment it had the same integrative role as on the international art scene – it brought local art scenes closer, it connected them with the same expressive means and the same notion of modernity. In the new type of discussions surrounding the affirmation of high modernist abstraction after 1957 the fundamental objections against it primarily referred to the concept of autonomous art as a category – since it excluded all social implications of artistic activities – contradictory to the ideological hypotheses of the socialist society. These objections, naturally, came from conservative art circles. The progressive ones considered the concept of the universalism and internationalism of gestural abstraction's expressive means unacceptable, given that both concepts – on the level of their historical references – belonged to the tradition of historical avant-gardes' constructive wing and could, therefore, be applied only on the discourse of geometric abstraction. The very same neo-constructivist circles found, as the authors of

- Ferdinand Kulmer,
Encounter I,
1966
Modern Gallery,
Zagreb

•
Janez Boljka,
Idol I,
 1960–1969

Museum of Modern
 and Contemporary
 Art, Rijeka



the *1st Didactic Exhibition* reported, the "romantic" vision of art equated with the natural process of creation unacceptable, because it shifted the focus from the rational to the metaphysical aspects of the creative process and thus again removed the artist from his real task, from the consideration of his own social and historical situation. However, from the point of view of high modernism, every contact between art and objective reality and its every attempt to meet the particular needs of a certain moment in history jeopardised the credibility of the modern artist, whose creative subjectivity was configured in terms of freedom, sovereignty and the autonomy of art itself.

Through the acknowledgment of the concept of autonomous art, abstraction really cleared up and liberated its aesthetic field of all political and ideological implications, as Jerko Denegri also maintains, but it could not have an impact on its own political implications in the field beyond "the limits of its competences".¹² The very same political implications of abstraction were an important motive for the transformation of high

modernism into a privileged visual expression of the Yugoslav society in the mid-fifties. However, if we ignore different varieties of Informal Art that flooded Croatian galleries and other exhibition venues as early as in 1957, in most other environments the term abstract art primarily referred to varieties of associative painting, which would not cross the line towards the field of pure visuality before the early sixties.

This relatively slow process greatly corresponded to the slow pace of changes in local audience's taste, which would finally prove particularly inclined towards the poetic and metaphorical – unproblematic – type of abstraction, which dominated the international mainstream of the fifties and early sixties. The global popularity of such painting was related to the equally unproblematic image of social reality, framed in the local context by the end



•
Stevan Luketić,
Toke,
 1959

Museum of Modern
 and Contemporary
 Art, Rijeka

•
Olga Jevrić,
*Complementary
Forms,*
1956–1957

Museum of
Contemporary Art,
Zagreb



of the period of "tough socialism", major changes in the quality and structure of everyday life and the collective feeling of satisfaction due to noticeable, positive consequences of modernisation. Optimism and the relative superficiality of Informal Art could, therefore, be interpreted as a consequence of the calculated pandering to collective imagination, which is not a satisfactory explanation for the relatively conservative interpretations of the basic postulates of high modernism in this type of local artists' painting practice. The causes of the mentioned conservatism, manifested in a large number of individual bodies of work as "a repetition of an already established aesthetic discourse... as a closed, completed aesthetic matter",¹³ should be sought, as Lidija Merenik suggested, in the conviction that Informal Art's prestigious (social) position relied precisely on its dedication to evolution rather than revolution of the painting medium. Aestheticised varieties of Informal Art could be encountered in all Yugoslav centres, but not at the same moment or in the same

•
Ivo Gattin,
*Red Surface with
Two Slashes,*
1962

Marinko Sudac
Collection, Zagreb



role. In Slovenian art they appeared relatively late and never became the dominant visual phenomenon on the local art scene, while in Croatia the privileged position of Informal Art and lyrical abstraction would constantly be questioned and contested since other, much more radical forms of art practice from the same poetic circuit appeared at the same time.

These are, of course, works of the representatives of Informal Art's "matter-oriented" current, their aggressive, unorthodox visual procedures, the radicalisation and gradual emancipation of the act of painting's performance aspects, new forms of art practices and – finally – very complex conclusions about the conceptual boundaries of painting. The most convincing example of such, significantly different understanding of Greenberg's plea for self-critical analysis of a disciplinary area, can be found in [Ivo Gattin's](#) painting already in 1957.

Gattin's detachment from painting conventions began with the use of found, discarded materials (wood, wire, sand, clippings from illustrated magazines) and an interest in the painted surface's tactile potential, as well as in the analysis of its structural elements, regarding them as limiting determinants of the creative process. A radicalisation of the relationships between conceptual and material specifics of painting ensued, as well as

• Examples of "radical" (matter-oriented) informalist painting, beginning of 1960s;
Ivo Gattin's working process, 1961-1962 (photo Nenad Gattin)

View of the exhibition *Socialism and Modernity*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb 2011-2012 (photo Paolo Mofardin)



Informational text labels for the artworks, including titles and dates.

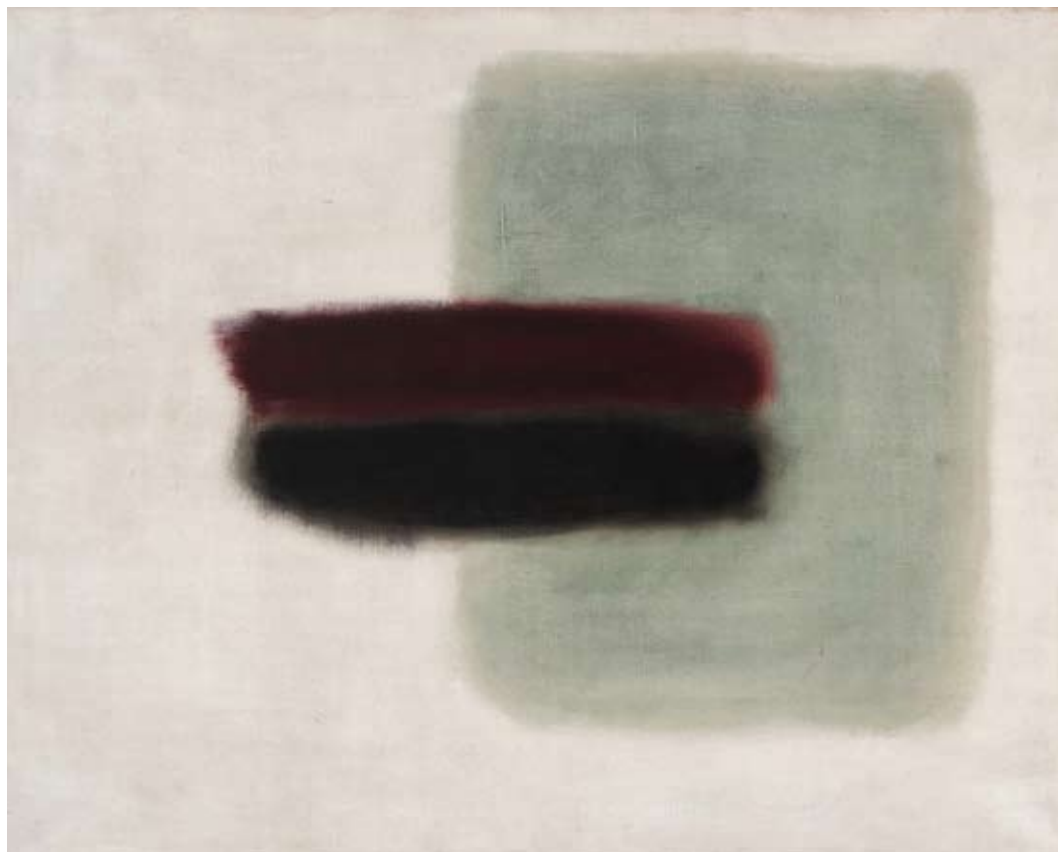
•
Miljenko Horvat,
Waste Land,
 1960

Marinko Sudac
 Collection, Zagreb



•
Marijan Jevšovar,
Spatiality,
 1961

Museum of
 Contemporary Art,
 Zagreb



the application of ever more aggressive working procedures – canvas creasing, cutting and burning – and a shift towards the object, i.e. rejecting the conventions of the act of painting, its ritualisation and a step towards performance. In the early sixties, when Gattin's working procedures already came quite close to the point of absolute destruction of the painting, the artist had to face two possibilities: reject all his personal conclusions on the nature of painting and return to his roots or quit art altogether. Gattin chose the latter and stopped painting in 1962. Only Eugen Feller would join him in this radical decision with his series of black paintings/bas reliefs (*Malampije*, 1960-1962), whose robustness, absolute materiality and self-reference convey the judgment of the (im) possibility of painting with equal credibility as Ivo Gattin's *Surfaces (Površine)* did. Apart from these two painters and the isolated work of Božidar Jelinić in Split, the matter-oriented or "radical" current of Informal Art did not have other envoys in Croatian art, but also not in the art of any other Yugoslav centre.

The gravitational field of Informal Art partly encompassed the creative production of the *Gorgona* art group. While Gattin and Feller engaged in the analysis of material and deconstruction of the traditional determinants of the painting medium, the interest of *Gorgona* members (Marijan Jevšovar, Đuro Seder, Josip Vaništa) was oriented towards the criticism of its aesthetic and crafting aspects, towards subduing of matter and annulment of a painting's illusionist and reflexive potentials. Such approach by *Gorgona* painters, based on a personal mistrust in the sense and possibility of painting in general, resulted in works that – each in its own way – reduced the painting to the state Jerko Denegri would call "zero point of expression".¹⁴

Unlike numerous other art groups of the time, gathered around a certain art programme or poetic option, the members of *Gorgona* Group were connected only by the common worldview – a combination of existentialist and Zen philosophy – but without neo-Marxism, anarchism or Maoism, or other components of the eclectic mixture of ideas and spiritual values that delineated the art practice of *Fluxus*, *Gorgona's* international art scene correlative. Its members – painters Josip Vaništa, Marijan Jevšovar, Julije Knifer, Đuro Seder, sculptor Ivan Kožarić, architect Miljenko Horvat, and art historians Dimitrije Bašičević, Matko Meštrović and Radoslav Putar – considered art primarily a transcendental activity, directed towards a quest for a sense and purpose of artistic activity. Since *Gorgona* equally rejected the utopian prospects of post-war neo-constructivism and the vehemence of gestural abstraction's "plastic-affirmative" spirit, its artists responded with irony, artificiality, hermeticism, intellectualism, and rejection of any kind of predefined, programmed work. However, even without that it was clear that the focus of their interest was the criticism of painting as a cult object and painting as the central medium of the universalist concept of modernism. In the mid-sixties it would result in the dematerialisation of artwork and methods/attitudes of the Group members close to conceptual art. A part of *Gorgona's* other activities – publishing a magazine and organising exhibitions – functioned within this critical endeavour as a certain "negative" of the conventional institutional practice: the magazine was in fact an anti-magazine and was not supposed to inform anybody about anything, the exhibitions took place at a framer's studio in central Zagreb and were not publicly promoted, their viewers were mainly random, therefore – as cultural events that presumed public reception and critical evaluation – they almost did not exist. Equally so, a series of other common activities of its members – barely shifted from the context of everyday life – also did not exist to the public. Throughout the entire lifespan of the Group, they kept their extremely private character and left almost no material traces. Non-institutional manner of action was not a consequence of a repressive cultural policy and its diffidence towards modern art, but a consciously chosen model of self-positioning, which enabled a more radical critical

intervention into the value system and institutional system of art. The consciously chosen seclusion, a consequence of such a choice, was a constituent element of *Gorgona's* strategy, just like hermeticism, artificiality, and obvious theatricality were essentially the crucial elements of its intellectual glamour. Alongside controlled public self-presentations and intellectual exclusiveness, the strategy also included hieratic, hypertrophied forms of mutual addressing, a play with archaic linguistic expression in the group's verbal and

•
Art group
Gorgona, 1965

photo Branko Balić
Institute of
Art History
Photo-Archives,
Zagreb



textual discourse, as well as hermetic and opaque formulations, understandable only to the Group members and a narrow circle of its associates.

They all belonged to the thin layer of well informed and networked cultural elite, initiated in contemporary art trends, which played an important role in connecting *Gorgona* with artists from other European countries. The most significant of these collaborations pertained to the *Gorgona* anti-magazine, a self-publishing endeavour in minimalist design, whose eleven issues and two unpublished issues functioned as individual works of art and preceded the format of "artist's book", acknowledged only later in the mid-seventies. A deliberate (calculated) distribution method and innovative form of expression resulted in original issues by Victor Vasarely, Harold Pinter and Dieter Roth, who were not joined – due to objective reasons – by Robert Rauschenberg, Piero Manzoni and Enzo Mari. Unlike the collaboration with the said authors, a consequence of spiritual and poetic resemblance, the exhibitions of François Morellet, Piero Dorazio, and Victor Vasarely at Salon G (1961-1963) were the result of a series of (fortunate) events, rather than a specific cultural strategy of the group. In addition to them and the Belgrade-based artist Radomir Damnjanović Damnjan, Studio G exhibited naive art and radical Informal Art, i.e. the forms of art practice which, at first sight, had nothing in common with *Gorgona's* poetics.

• Production of the art group Gorgona 1961 - 1966

View of the exhibition *Socialism and Modernity*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb 2011-2012 (photo Paolo Mofardin)



However, if we made an attempt at a more precise description of *Gorgona's* poetics, we would find ourselves in dire straits, since the spiritual perimeter, the fundamental cohesive element of the Group and a certain benchmark in personal observations on the purpose and objective of its members' art was complete freedom of choice of one's own poetic starting point. The Group's production was therefore comprised of extremely individualised art, conceptual in character, such as *Commissional Examination of Spring* (1962), Radoslav Putar's proposal for the realisation of *Collective Work* (1963), Vaništa's *Thoughts for the Moon* (1964), sculptor Ivan Kožarić's proposal to make casts of the "interiors of several cars, studio apartments, trees... parks and all important voids in the city", Vaništa's *Exhibition without Exhibits* (1964), unrealised projects by Dimitrije Bašičević, as well as the already mentioned painting production. In the case of Josip Vaništa, the founder and *spiritus movens* of the Group, the key for its understanding was the term "scantiness", achieved through gradual elimination of meta-narrative elements of a work, reduction of visual tools, elimination of the last remaining remnants of illusionism and – finally – rejection of the very process of painting. However, this did not mean giving up painting as such, but rather substitution of the physical creative process by a mental concept, and the material artwork by its verbal equivalent (*Painting*, 1964).

Although the rejection of the illusionist component of modernist painting and the demythologization of the artistic gesture are common characteristics of all Vaništa's works and works by all other *Gorgona's* painters, only Julije Knifer came close to his radicalism. Fascinated by the notion of "scantiness", same as Vaništa, Knifer set the finding of the form of anti-painting – a work whose "monotonous rhythm" and "maximum contrast" would be achieved by minimal formative means – as his goal. He came close to the realisation of the anti-painting concept by devising the meander motive, which by the beginning of the 60s grew into the basic and only theme of his painting. Transformed into some kind of universal painting sign, Knifer's meander proved to be entirely open, but surprisingly resistant to all attempts at implying different meta-narrative contents and theoretical explanations into it, offered already from mid-sixties onwards as an example of different poetic options – from *New Tendencies'* neo-constructivism to minimalism and primary painting. The reduced form and monotony of his compositions have only in later interpretations been explained in terms of radical criticism of modernist painting and brought into the context of *Gorgona's* poetics.

Seen from today's perspective, *Gorgona*, as well as *New Tendencies*, owe a lot to the process of ideological differentiation of the local culture scene, commenced by the end of the 50s, as well as to the entire complex of social and political turmoil from the beginning of the next decade, which completely changed the power relations on the local cultural scene, opening the socialist Yugoslavia to intensive communication with the rest of the world. Increased flow of people, ideas, and information enhanced and encouraged cultural exchange with foreign countries and by the beginning of the 60s turned Zagreb into one of vivid locations on the cultural map of Europe. Experimental work forms, direct contacts between local and foreign artists/curators, unorthodox modes of artistic behaviour and extra-institutional forms of art activity have been no novelty on local visual art scene since the mid-sixties. Many of these elements we encounter for the first time in the activity of *Gorgona*, but because of its specific relation to the art mainstream and its decision to position its activity outside of the institutional framework of the then art world, the Group's production was unknown to broader public until the mid-seventies. Its later recognition is the result of the work of art critics directly involved into the project of promoting the first generation of *new art practice*.¹⁵



Although Tomislav Gotovac also belongs to this poetic circle, the structuring of his artistic oeuvre, commenced back in 1957 was realised through the usage of different media and different creative devices. He connects the interests of several generations of artists, so that it is not justified to link him only with the phenomenon of *new art practice*. The works of this oeuvre are doubtlessly subject to different classification determinants, of which the one of "new realism" can certainly and without reserve be applied to Gotovac's collages from 1964. The reasons because of which this part of his oeuvre has not yet been interpreted in the poetic code of the "European answer to pop-art" are not entirely clear, because he cannot be accused of "opaqueness" in terms of meaning or formal hybridisation that could bring this kind of classification in question. Apart from the fact that what we have at hand is a really unique, extremely rare example of this type of art practice in Croatian art. Poetic recycling and accumulating of debris of urban, industrial civilisation, clear references to the tradition of Dadaism or the application of collage technique seem even less important arguments in favour of the "new realism" classification than the image of (socialist) reality and only rudimentary approaching of the Yugoslav community towards the consumer society, which is the basic theme of all Gotovac's early works. The way in which this artist tackles the problem of social (media) construction of gender, sexuality, poverty, reception of popular culture influences of West European and American culture, as well as many other aspects of an entirely different experience of modernity, generates a complex image of psychological consequences of modernization processes, which do not reach the surface of the public discourse on

• **Josip Vaništa,**
Silver Line,
1964–1997

Museum of
Contemporary Art,
Zagreb

living in the socialist society. The devastatingly "realistic" and extremely complex relation of the private and public spheres, in which autobiographical elements and personal projections of the world undoubtedly have an advantage over any other system of values, unverified and not adopted through the practice of life, are a radical detachment from all other forms of neo-avant-garde of the first half of the 60s. The concept of the author-subject behind Gotovac's collages confirms that for him art is neither a metaphysical, transcendental activity nor a tool for changing the world, but rather a mode of *existing in the world*. Thanks to his work (performances *Breathing and Leafing through Elle* – both from 1962) a "revolutionary transition from assessing the status of the artwork towards problematising the actions of the artist" was made¹⁶, later recognized as the initial moment of a radical breach with formative practices and ideology of modernism. In this sense, the appearance of Tomislav Gotovac on the Croatian visual art scene heralded the "great refusal" that took place by the end of the 60s – during the most interesting and exciting period of cultural and political history of socialist Yugoslavia.¹⁷

Divisions, grouping, and regrouping around different programmatic points of departure were only the symptoms of a deeply-rooted need for redefining the position of art in the entire European post-war society. Set in motion by a complete breach with the tradition, by the end of the 40s or – like in Yugoslavia – by the beginning of the 50s, this process, marked by pronounced, almost palpable insecurity in relation to the ontological nature of art, led to a gradual and inevitable dissolution of the modernist paradigm. Numerous theoretical and political issues that it tackled would find their adequate formulation only in the militant appearance of art groups and movements from the beginning of the 60s (*GRAV, Gruppo N, New Tendencies*). Their attempts at democratization and revival of a tight connection of art with social and ideological issues, by which they tried to redefine the meaning of the notion of art and its subject matter, would mark the beginning of a (completely) different story about the art of the second half of the 20th century. In Yugoslavia it matched the dynamic internal-political situation and intense international activity of the state leadership (the Non-aligned Movement), which opened the paths to collaboration in all other segments of social life.

Following the intention to encourage better contacts between local and international artists, during the first half of the 60s a series of international events was launched, which brought top protagonists of the musical, dance, and visual art scenes to Croatia. At the *Music Biennale* (a festival launched in 1961) we could see and hear the appearances by John Cage, Nam June Paik, Charlotte Moorman, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Mauricio Kagel, Dieter Schnabel, Pierre Schaeffer, and Anna Halprin & Dancers' Workshop Company. As accompanying events to the *New Tendencies* international movement Zagreb could hear the lectures by Umberto Eco, Abraham Moles, Giulio Carlo Argan, Gillo Dorfles, and Filiberto Mena, while on the Island of Korčula, as part of the *Korčula Summer School of Philosophy* program (launched in 1964) the lecturers were, among others, Ernst Bloch and Herbert Marcuse. If we add to this the international *Genre Film Festival* (GEFF), devoted to experimental film and launched in 1963, translations of a vast array of contemporary European fiction and literary theory, a growing rock music public, and the expansion of mass media, we can assemble an integral image of an intense, swift process of "opening" with far-reaching culturological and psycho-social consequences.

During that period, the central role in the field of visual art was assumed by Zagreb's City Gallery of Contemporary Art, open towards new forms of art practices and new ways of understanding art. Thanks to the work of its curatorial team, by the beginning of the 60s Zagreb also became the pivotal point of *New Tendencies* international art movement.



• Tomislav Gotovac,
Untitled (Ilirija),
1964

Sarah Gotovac
Collection, Zagreb



• Tomislav Gotovac,
Untitled
(BP My Jazz)
1964

Sarah Gotovac
Collection, Zagreb



- The **1st New Tendencies** exhibition, held in August of 1961 at the initiative of the artist Almir Mavignier, was a certain overview of visual art phenomena from the verge of the European Informal Art mainstream, which – in their striving towards a new, experimental approach to art and a different, socially engaged position of the artist in the contemporary society – were an answer to the socially indifferent visual art production of "absolute painting". Included into the forms of art practices in which the critical potential towards the dominant projection of modernity was recognised were monochrome painting (Piero Manzoni, Enrico Castellani, Julije Knifer), objects created from industrial materials (Alvin Mavignier, Oto Piene, Heinz Mack), examples of "systemic research" (Francois Morellet, Karl Gerstner, Ludwig Wilding), optical research into the surface and structure of objects (Marck Adrian, Julio Le Parc, Günther Uecker, *Gruppo N*, Toni Costa, Edoardo Landi), and programmed and kinetic art.

International art movement
New Tendencies,
1961-1973
View of the exhibition
Socialism and
Modernity, Museum of
Contemporary Art,
Zagreb 2011-2012
(photo Paolo Mofardin)

However, instead of a simple assertion about the coexistence of disparate poetics, the first exhibition of *New Tendencies* presented to the public the work of many artists who simultaneously, in different European countries, developed a new and almost identical art concept. Focused on optic experiments and taking the insights of contemporary science as their point of departure, often using new production technologies, they arrived – everyone in his/her environment – to very similar results. Although they were not connected by any common program platform, this was a truly international phenomenon that had its representatives in Croatian art as well. This fact, along with undoubted readiness of the authors to collaborate, encouraged the organisation of the second *New Tendencies* exhibition, held in 1963.



• Otto Piene,
Smoked Painting,
1959

Museum of
Contemporary Art,
Zagreb

In the period from 1961 to 1963, the majority of participants of the first *New Tendencies* exhibition focused their interest on social aspects of production, reception, and distribution of art, which triggered fervent discussions on the democratisation of art, social conditioning of the relation between the artist and the public (society), and the repressive influence of market mechanisms on contemporary visual art production. The problem of the art's class-related nature, which was the main source of possible differences in the interpretation of operative tasks and conceptual points of departure of *New Tendencies*, was left aside in these discussions. The impact of this oversight would be demonstrated in the outcome of the second exhibition that, on the one hand, led to a much more precise determination of common programmatic standpoints, but on the other hand revealed important and deep differences between the movement participants, thus heralding its inevitable dissolution. Shifting the focus from art exploration to critical and theoretical discourse, insisting on impersonality, glorification of technology, science, and rational comprehension of art have detached the artists inclined to spiritual origins of modernism from *New Tendencies*, which has considerably narrowed the poetic scope of the movement since 1963. Among the participants of the exhibition we could encounter only the artists whose creative actions were subjected to strict surveillance of rational thinking. Therefore, at the exhibition *New Tendencies 2* (August 1963), apart from several already known names, there would be the entire *GRAV* display, the Italian art groups *Gruppo N* and *Gruppo T*, and for the first time a larger number of local authors. Along with Vjenceslav Richter there was almost the entire painting section of EXAT 51 (Kristl, Picelj, Srnc), sculptor Vojin Bakić, and as a representative of the youngest generation of Croatian artists focused on optic research, painter Miroslav Šutej.

Along the lines of the postulates by Matko Meštrović, one of the most important theoreticians of the movement, put forward in the text *Ideology of New Tendencies* in 1963, *New Tendencies* should be understood as the "first criticism and first opposition to components of corruption and estrangement and a determined demand for demystification of the notion of art and artistic creation".¹⁸ Their programmatic orientation implies the affirmation of the spirit of collective work, orientation to "plastic-visual research", the attempt at determining the "objective psycho-physical basis of the

plastic phenomenon and visual perception", acceptance of the principle of industrial production, and, in accordance with that, adjustment of artistic ideas to the production of a "serial" art product. As a common goal of *New Tendencies*' members, which emerged from such program concept, Meštrović stressed the change in the meaning of the very notion of art. Heroics that imbued his vision of the movement are close to the impetus of the historical avant-garde, so that *New Tendencies* in that sense saw themselves as a contribution to the continuity of constructivist tradition, especially in the segment that stressed the need of interweaving art with everyday life.

However, until 1965 the situation in the cultural, political, and social environment has substantially changed. The movement that had initially gathered the adherents of a still marginal tendency in European art was suddenly relocated into its central part. Awards and participation of prominent members of *New Tendencies* at major international exhibitions resulted in accelerated commoditisation and musealisation of their production. This was undoubtedly encouraged also by the exhibition *Responsive Eye* (MoMA, New York, 1965), which has completely neutralized the ideological charge of the movement, equalizing European artists' optic research with the poetics of American pop-art.

•
Getulio Alviani,
Light Lines 7,
1962

Museum of
Contemporary Art,
Zagreb



•
Vjenceslav
Richter,
Relief-meter,
1967

Museum of
Contemporary Art,
Zagreb



The weakening of the idea of cohesion, and the trivialisation of previous work results, supported the assumption about problems in the social perception of the artists of *New Tendencies*, which became the primary and only topic of the third Zagreb exhibition, whose central part were the results of the competition for proposals of a multiple after the concept by Enzo Mario. The intention of thus achieving "ideological concentration and a common goal", against the background of the synthesis of art, science, and technology, as well as a common belief in art as a rational, experimental, collective activity, firmly integrated into the contemporary technological civilisation has, however, not found its confirmation in the visual art production. A series of mostly mediocre works at this third exhibition, held under the title *new tendency 3* in Zagreb in August of 1965, showed that *New Tendencies*, as well as Informal Art a few years earlier, entered a period of crisis that seriously questioned their attempt to assume an avant-garde position in European art on the basis of a socially progressive and rational program orientation.

After facing an evident crisis of the movement, the next exhibition of *New Tendencies*, held in Zagreb in the autumn of 1969, made a radical turn towards a new field of visual

•
Michel Fadat,
*Visual
Instrument*,
1965

Museum of
Contemporary Art,
Zagreb



research – electronic media (television, computers, and video) and research into the phenomenon of mass communications. At that point computer technology required an experimental, structured, and collaborative approach to visual research, so that its use was completely consummate with the ideological orientation of the movement. Moreover, the turn towards new electronic media was the pinnacle of the *New Tendencies'* striving to define a new utopian horizon of visual art through the use of technological and scientific possibilities and insights of the 60s.

The exhibition *tendencies 4* was preceded by a two-year process of intensive communication with numerous information theoreticians, researchers of semiotics, and advocates of "exact aesthetics" that reached its peak point at the international colloquium *Computers and Visual Research*. Started in August of 1968, only a day after in London the exhibition *Cybernetic Serendipity* was opened, the colloquium generated an unexpected concentration of creative energy and launched a series of discussions related to a large scope of problems – reaching from the "interaction"¹⁹ of man and machine, social implications of introducing IT into the society, and the possibility of misuse of computer technology, to the issue of its then still very limited capacities for use in the processes of mass communication and realisation of certain art concepts.

Long, thorough, and serious preparations resulted in an exhibition that, in spite of a relatively small number of participants and a modest scope of presented works, offered a theoretically convincing and methodologically rounded-up overview of the short history of the new media art. Along with the display, which some today's authors consider better in quality and – in the sense of theoretical elaboration of the approach to the problem of machine-supported visual research – more important than the London event. The other very important result of the events in the wake of the *tendencies 4* exhibition was the launch of the international journal *bit international* (1968/1972), the first interdisciplinary theory-related publication in Yugoslav cultural territory, devoted to the theory of visual art, design theory, theory of information and mass media and one of the earliest specialized journals of that kind in Europe. The international circle of its contributors was very wide and mostly directed at research of aesthetic aspects of the



interrelation of communication media and art, covering the field of information aesthetics (Max Bense, Abraham Moles), cybernetic aesthetics (Herbert Franke, Evan Harris Walker), and participative and generative aesthetics (Michael Noll, Frieder Nake, Georg Nees, Kurt Alsleben). The results of the work of these authors, of which some were for the first time presented to European public through their contributions to *bit international*, are today the foundation of cyber-aesthetics and digital media aesthetics. The orientation to electronic media, emphasized in the last issue of this journal by collected papers devoted to the phenomenon of television, whose editor was Vera Horvat-Pintarić, had its cultural and social background in the undeniable fascination of the Yugoslav society with this new, exciting medium. Its expansion was accompanied by the deepest – although naive – belief that responsible and creative use of mass visual communications technology could become an instrument of positive social changes.

The fifth and last *New Tendencies* exhibition, held in 1973, was clearly detached from the principle of "unified goals" by its very title – *tendency 5* – and even the idea of art movement as such. Along with the section of computer visual research, for the first time it encompassed the selection of conceptual art, marking the final and radical breach with the ideology of high modernism, to which the critical perspective of *New Tendencies* also entirely belonged.

•
Sanja Iveković,
Dalibor Martinis,
*TV telops, 1972-
1974 (ordered and
broadcasted by
Zagreb Radio-
television)*

Courtesy of
Sanja Iveković

Although this was a cultural phenomenon that brought a previously unimaginable number of international artists to Zagreb and managed to tackle many very important and currently burning issues, equally related to the very idea of the new art practice and the position/role of art and artist in the society, *New Tendencies* have not experienced an adequate reaction within local boundaries. One of the reasons for relative disinterestedness of Croatian/Yugoslav art criticism in this movement could be found in its initial formal and poetic heterogeneity, undeniable exclusivity, and focus on theoretical explanations. The other, even more important reason, is certainly the radical striving of *New Tendencies* to "redesign the society with the help of art and redefine art by activating its function of the primary instrument in shaping human environment",²⁰ which makes the visual art production of this international movement, especially the theoretical discourse that accompanied it, a kind of a "floating signifier", a constituent element of a group of variegated theoretical and philosophical explanations that circulated the cultural and intellectual space of former Yugoslavia during the 60s, attempting to fill the void that came about through disintegration of the utopian vision of the self-governance socialism social project by its own projections of a better and more humane future society.

Conceptual art that emerged on Yugoslav visual art scene by the end of the 60s and the beginning of the 70s, which means simultaneously, in almost identical form, and equally spontaneously as at a series of other locations all around the world – from North and South America to Japan – would take a mostly indifferent or even repulsive attitude towards technological, utopian visions of this kind. Unlike the art of high modernism, which in all parts of Yugoslavia indicated a certain continuity of pre-war modernist tradition, conceptual art was the first visual art phenomenon onto which this kind of relation could not be applied. In that sense there are no great differences between the different expressions of *new art practice*²¹, in formal and media terms a heterogeneous complex of post-object and processual forms of art expression created between 1967 and 1975, and similar art occurrences in international context, as there are also no firm arguments that might justify its connection with earlier, similar examples of artistic activity. If we want to understand this visual art phenomenon, which was an authentic attempt of the younger generation of artists to actively and directly participate in the life of their community, much more important is the link with radical social movements of the 60s and the affirmative relation to popular, especially rock culture of the time than certain historical references, formal similarities or theoretical postulates (the principle of dematerialisation of the artwork, the striving towards as direct presentation of its conceptual and theoretical points of departure as possible), which were occasionally, but in an essentially different social, historical and cultural context shared with neo-avant-gardes from the beginning of the 60s.

It is really difficult to detach the beginnings of conceptual art in Yugoslavia from the field of rock culture, from alternative forms of behaviour and alternative lifestyles, from experiments with states of expanded awareness, as well as from a critical view of the consequences of modernisation and consumerism. Regardless of the question if we are talking about the intellectually sophisticated concept of *reism* of the Slovenian *OHO* group, its shift towards *arte povera* about 1968 and, soon afterwards, towards the development of "transcendental" conceptualism or the anarchic, socially provocative, "intuitive" conceptual art of *Crveni Peristil*, the breach with the ideology of high modernism by the end of the 60s is clear and complete. The important task of compromising its ethics and aesthetics was completed already with the activity of neo-avant-gardes and thanks to this, *new art practice* could make a step further towards new forms of expression and a new system of values. In that sense, the situation on Croatian/Yugoslav visual art scene by the end of the 60s was identical to trends and processes in west European art



• Vera Fišer,
Untitled (Me),
1969–1974

Private Collection,
Zagreb

and entirely different from the one in most other socialist countries in which processual and post-object forms of art practice were not experienced as detachment from the modernist concept of art but rather as its evolution. In its principal characteristics – giving up the materialization of the artwork, redefinition of the social function of art and social construction of the authorial subject, resistance towards institutionalized models of artistic activity, and critical approach to social reality – new art practice belongs into the context of related, experimental and radical forms of artistic and theoretical activity, in this period recorded also in other areas of Yugoslav cultural production – from film and theatre to philosophy and literary theory. Their primary connecting line was the already mentioned new order of social values, which originated from a critical relation to social, political, and ethic consequences of the previous development of Yugoslav socialist society and resistance towards the way of functioning of its institutional mechanisms. The result of this resistance were different extra-institutional models of cultural production, formed in the area of youth subculture that by the end of the 70s and the beginning of the 80s became a true alternative to official culture.

•
Marko Pogačnik,
Bottles,
1967

View of the exhibition
*Socialism and
Modernity*, Museum of
Contemporary Art,
Zagreb 2011-2012
(photo Paolo Mofardin)



•
Marko Pogačnik,
Untitled
**(Perforated
Surface 1 - 3),**
1965

View of the exhibition
*Socialism and
Modernity*, Museum of
Contemporary Art,
Zagreb 2011-2012
(photo Paolo Mofardin)

Youth subculture is a social and cultural phenomenon known to all post-war societies, but the process of its emancipation in that time's Yugoslavia commenced only by mid-sixties, through gradual forming of a corresponding organizational framework linked to student cultural institutions. Between 1967 and 1972, within students' centres in Zagreb, Belgrade, and Novi Sad, new galleries were founded or the existing ones activated; they established mutual links and formed an alternative communication network, which became the key location of articulation and affirmation of various events related to *new art practice* and alternate, more democratic ways of publicly presenting artworks. This was therefore the initial phase of creation of the youth cultural scene that took place in the background of the students' protests in 1968 and the demands for redefinition of the economic, political, and territorial organisation of the former state in the context of *Croatian Spring* 1971, which would be followed by an open repression directed at participants of this political turmoil and a much stricter regime of state surveillance over the entire field of cultural production.

Students' cultural institutions, as it seemed at first glance, were exempted from this kind of political surveillance. Decently financed and programmatically autonomous, in that period they developed a very dynamic exhibition activity, established an intensive interchange of contents, and achieved (relatively) free contacts with the independent international art scene. However, in the background of this seemingly privileged position there was the attempt of ghettoisation of critical forms of artistic activity and thinking, limiting their effects on a narrow segment of urban student youth, which, in accordance with the nature of things, thanks to its information level, education, collective sensibility, and resistance towards social and cultural values of the older generation, was ready to accept new cognitive paradigms.

Nevertheless, the relation to such policy of the government and thus its attitude towards the student cultural scene from the end of the 60s and the beginning of the 70s to a large extent depended on the local situation. In Novi Sad this relation – because of a very conservative Party leadership and its extremely repressive behaviour – proved pronouncedly dramatic. The centre of youth culture in that city was *Tribina mladih*, founded in 1954 and reactivated in the period 1968 – 1974. A large amount of creative energy – liberated with the appearance of rock-culture – resulted with a very rich literary,

textuality" – application of the experiences of visual poetry to the context of land art (Slavko Matković) – to body art (Attila Csernik), Szalma's situa(c)tions (*Dada*, 1972) and verbal-vocal-visual explorations by Katalin Ladik, whose gender-aware works and artistic behaviour represent the first convincing example of feminist art on Yugoslav visual art scene. Here we should also mention the photo-performances by Bálint Szombathely *Lenin in Budapest* and *Bauhaus* (both from 1972), his experimental poetry, especially *nontextualité* as a mark of the "procedure of decontextualisation of the textual medium within itself" and lively mail-art activity of most Group members, to which also belong the "correspondence" exhibition with a large number of participants from all European countries – from Endre Tóth to Kosuth and Beuys.

•
Bálint
Szombathely,
*Lenin in
Budapest*,
1972

Marinko Sudac
Collection, Zagreb



Methodological and formal variety, enriched also by actions/happenings by Bogdanka Poznanović, was on the one hand delineated by pronounced poetic quality and on the other by open criticism of Communist Party policies, which – in such radical form and intensity – by the beginning of the 70s could not be found anywhere in Yugoslavia. It was definitely the answer of a creative, homogeneous, and self-aware art community to a state of things that, according to the assertion of Nebojša Milenković, Slovenian poet and critic Jaša Zlobec described in one of the panel discussions at *Tribina mladih* as something "imaginable only in the USSR."²⁴ Along with the inclination to experimenting, multimedia, collective work, and work contacts with artists from other centres (OHO group, Goran Trbuljak, Braco Dimitrijević etc. exhibited at *Tribina mladih*), the atmosphere of creative resistance is that which made the events at Novi Sad visual art scene completely authentic and very important in the context of the story about conceptual and post-object art in Yugoslavia of the 70s.

If we, however, consider the situation on the Croatian visual art scene between 1967 and 1974, in the period overlapping with the work of *Tribina mladih* in Novi Sad, but also with the lively activity of the first generation of adherents of *new art practice*, we can observe that also the Zagreb Students' Centre Gallery developed different strategies

•
Katalin Ladik,
Score,
1973

Marinko Sudac
Collection, Zagreb



of outmanoeuvring cultural policies that tried to ghettoise the students' cultural scene, reaching from joint projects with other exhibition institutions and organisation of art events in collaboration with local communities to initiating discussions on concrete problems that out of the art sphere influence the sphere of social relations. Such work methods have widened the circle of potential public to social groups that rarely visited official exhibition venues, enhanced the influence of this institution to local art scene and by the beginning of the 70s turned the Zagreb Student Centre Gallery into one of focal points of Croatian contemporary art.

Undeniable credit for this state of things goes to its then manager, Želimir Koščević. Agile, well-informed, and inclined to experimenting, both in the field of art and curatorial

•
Bogdanka
Poznanović,
*Action Hart-
Object*,
1970

Marinko Sudac
Collection, Zagreb

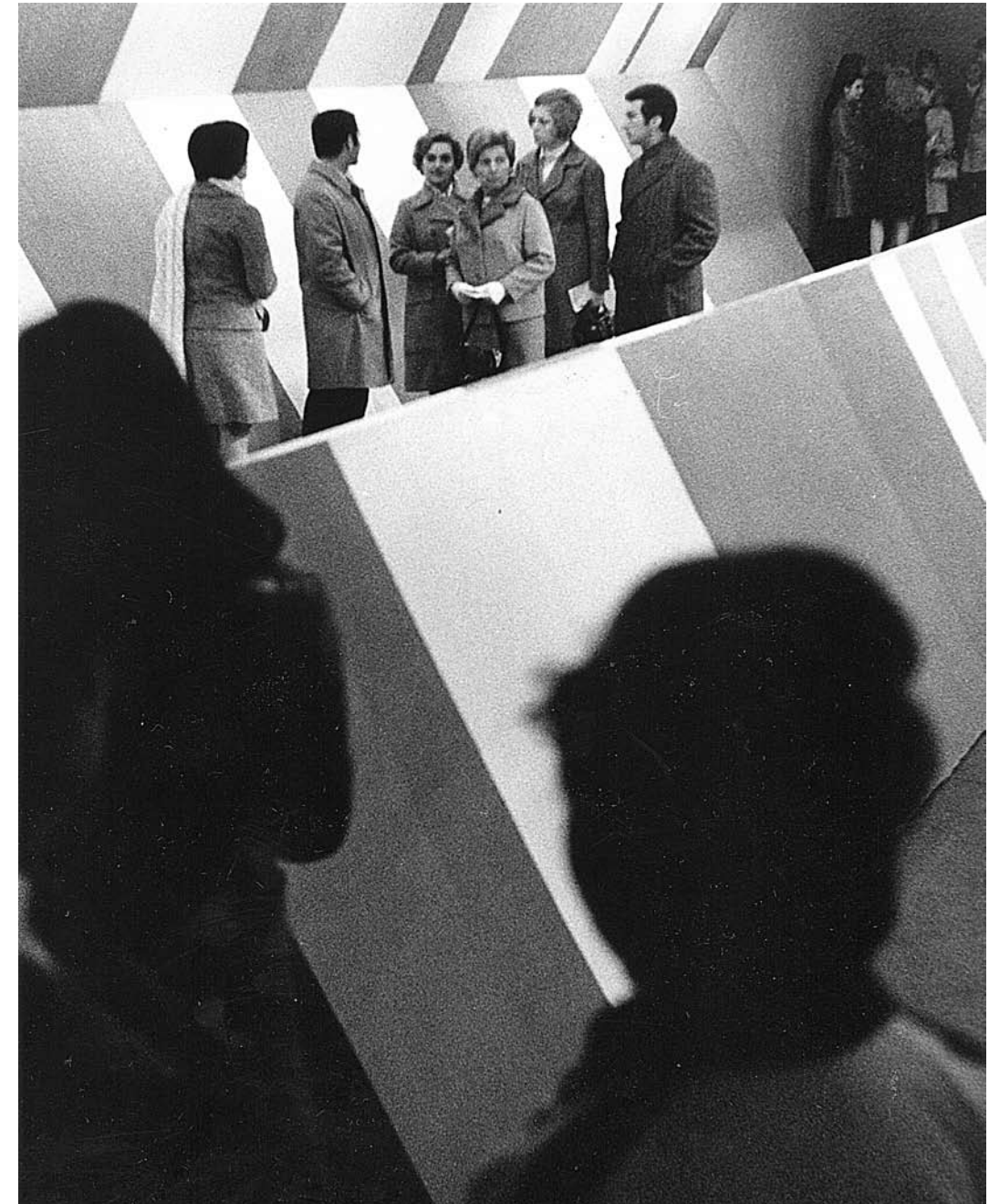


practice, by the end of 1969 and during 1970, after a short-lasting collaboration with the last generation of artists close to *New Tendencies* (Miroslav Šutej, Ante Kuduz, Ljerka Šibenik, Mladen Galić), he made a radical turn in the program policy of the Gallery and organized the first individual appearances of then students of Zagreb's Fine Art Academy – Braco Dimitrijević, Sanja Iveković, Dalibor Martinis, Gorki Žuvela, Jagoda Kaloper, and Dean Jokanović.

These were happenings-environments, based on the reception of recent events in European and global contemporary art, reaching from minimalism and pop-art to arte povera and happening, which did not take deep roots in Zagreb. The use of non-artistic, industrially generated or discarded materials, the treatment of the artwork as a transient, changeable structure or a certain plastic situation completed only through the actions of the public, the need for abandoning galleries and interventions into urban space, as well as the awareness of the social dimension of art were responsible for the reference "new Zagreb plasticists"²⁵, but also for the reputation of being an offspring of *New Tendencies*. However, the mentioned artists have never functioned as a group, but as a cluster of pronounced individuals joined by their efforts towards the democratisation of art, but from very different positions in comparison to the ones that we encounter in program guidelines of *New Tendencies*. Their critical attitude to institutional mechanisms of the art world, which distort, obscure, and hinder any discussion of the very idea of art, as well as about who, under what circumstances, and in what way or in whose name decides what is and what is not a work of art, together with the shift from aesthetic to

•
Module N&Z,
Dalibor Martins
first individual ex-
hibition, Student
Centre Gallery,
Zagreb 1969

CAAS Visual Arts
Archives, Zagreb



ethic aspects of artistic activity, shows a much broader and entirely different type of interest for social, economic, and ideological aspects of the art world than the interest of neo-avant-gardes of the 60s. Along with the hostility towards the existing system of art production constant attempts at adoption of the position of authority in interpretation and evaluation of art accompany it, as well as new forms of artistic behaviour that attempt to eliminate or at least radically shift the boundary between art and real life. The mentioned poetic guidelines to a certain extent actually also mark the activities of *Gorgona*, but in almost identical meaning we encounter them only in the works of Tomislav Gotovac and Josip Stošić, who all the way to the end of the 60s worked entirely outside of the dominant system of art. What makes the work biographies of these two artists different and specific in comparison to most other adherents of *new art practice* is the fact that the primary field of Gotovac's interest was film, in which he remained involved in different ways and roles throughout his entire life (actor, director, "professional" viewer), while Stošić was a poet and one of the most prominent experts for medieval architecture and city planning in the Croatian history of art. However, these other fields of interest have



Great-grand-fathers, art group OHO exhibition at the City Gallery of Contemporary Art, Zagreb 1969

photo Marija Braut
Museum of Contemporary Art
Archives, Zagreb

- not, in terms of media and formally, limited their visual art production, but enriched it and made it more complex in relation to meaning. Thus Stošić's work, who has often been studied by art history also in the category of visual poetry, is a rare example of "classic" conceptual art, the one whose consequential and radical anti-aestheticism was founded on theoretical analyses of the language as a medium and material of the artwork. The specific quality of their oeuvres was partly conditioned by their interest in entirely different problems, anticipated by the beginning of the 60s by the already mentioned Gotovac's collages, only slightly later experimental films, first intimate (*Pills*, 1957; *Breathing*, 1962; *Showing Elle*, 1962) and public performances (*Shaving and Cutting Hair*, 1970), works in the medium of photography (*Heads*, 1970), the first and only happening (*Our Happ*, 1968) and first striking (*Running through the Centre of Belgrade*, 1971) in Croatian contemporary art and on the Yugoslav visual art scene. A radical detachment from all usual forms of artistic activity and an anarchic artistic behaviour resulted in Gotovac's almost symbolical position in the narrative about the history of south-eastern Europe's conceptual art, but as during the 70s he spent most of his time in Belgrade, intensely involved in film-making, it is difficult to precisely determine the modalities of and his real impact on the Croatian visual art scene of this period.

We should, however, bear in mind that between 1974 and 1976, because of changed social and political circumstances, the members of the first generation of Croatian conceptual artists were frequent guests in Belgrade. An especially important role in that respect played the Belgrade Gallery of the Student Cultural Centre (GSKC), which as part of its exhibition projects (especially the famous *April Encounters*) offered the possibility of exhibiting, and even realisation of new works and – after the neutralisation of the Students' Centre Gallery in Zagreb 1973/1974 – for a certain period functioned as the central location of *new art practice* on the cultural territory of the former state. Because until the end of the 70s his early art production was relatively unknown, what deeply impressed Gotovac's younger colleagues was his uncompromising resistance to each form of institutional activity, both in art and everyday life; it is this ethical dimension of his artistic behaviour that had a special impact in the given social and political circumstances.

Ethical issues – both the ones affecting the determinants of individual artistic activity and the ones affecting ways of functioning of art institutions, as well as the problem of the general relationship between art and society – are undoubtedly one of the central themes of *new art practice* of the first half of the 70s. Already the earliest works by its adherents, the ones who showed interest in public space – in the ways of its public use, in the problem of discrepancy between the politically proclaimed belief in designing a more humane environment and the anonymity of new urban zones – definitely contain an



OTVORENE IZLOŽBE JAGODE KALOPEK I S LIJEVA NA DESNO: J. KALOPEK, BORIS BUČAN, RAIKO GRUČIĆ, SANJA IVEKOVIĆ, DALIBOR MARTINIĆ, SAŠA BRNETIĆ, PETAR DABAC, VJERAN ZUPPA, DAVOR TOMIČIĆ, MIRO BUDIŠAVLJEVIĆ, ENES MIĐIĆ, ŽELIMIR KOŠEVIĆ, DARKO SCHNEIDER, VLADIMIR STRAŽA.



Jagoda Kaloper first individual exhibition, Student Centre Gallery, Zagreb 1970

CAAS Visual Arts
Archives, Zagreb

Untitled Environment, Sanja Iveković first individual exhibition, Student Centre Gallery, Zagreb 1970

CAAS Visual Arts
Archives, Zagreb

•
Gorki Žuvela
 first individual
 exhibition,
 Student Centre
 Gallery, Zagreb
 1970

photo Enes Midžić
 CAAS Visual Arts
 Archives, Zagreb



•
Gorki Žuvela,
Colored Ropes,
 exhibition
Possibilities for
'71, City Gallery
 of Contemporary
 Art, Zagreb 1971

photo Enes Midžić
 Museum of
 Contemporary Art
 Archives, Zagreb



•
Jagoda Kaloper,
Black People,
 exhibition
Possibilities for
'71, City Gallery
 of Contemporary
 Art, Zagreb 1971

Museum of
 Contemporary Art
 Archives, Zagreb



ethical dimension. Considering the very complex political situation by the end of the 60s and the beginning of the 70s, in which, because of frequent protests and rallies the conditions of using public space were restricted and complicated, different types of events, urban actions and interventions into the urban space that assume free, creative and, in certain cases, radical changes in the hierarchy of existing spatial relations, as well as the critique of usual methods of inscribing symbolical and ideological contents into urban tissue, doubtlessly have their – although maybe insufficiently articulated – political dimension. This interpretation is supported by projects of the Students' Centre Gallery – the section *Proposal* within the *6th Zagreb Salon* (1971) and the exhibition *Gulliver in Wonderland* in Karlovac's Korana Sculpture Park (1971), as well as the exhibition in the Gallery of Contemporary Art entitled *Possibilities for 1971*, which can be considered almost paradigmatic examples of ethically motivated social engagement of representatives of *new art practice*. Points of departure and goals of all three exhibitions were almost identical; they were summarized by Želimir Koščević in his exposition of the selection



concept of the *Proposal for the 6th Zagreb Salon*, based on the conviction that art must have a "broader social dimension" and become available to all members of the then already significantly stratified Yugoslav society. Nevertheless, this can only happen if art discarded its elitist character, defied the prohibitions set by museums and galleries, and, by going out into the streets, squares, and parks got immersed into the "living body of urban environment". Inviting artists to approach "the city as a place of plastic events and processes" in their projects, offering new forms of public plastic works that would activate the perception and imagination of citizens, Koščević defined a kind of programmatic platform used also by Dalibor Matičević, the author of the exhibition *Possibilities for '71*, mounted by the end of that year. The poetic scope of works shown at these exhibitions, but also of those created on other similar initiatives, recorded all the way to mid-seventies, is very wide, reaching from reminiscences of minimalism and artistic actions with elements of happening and performance to examples of conceptual art. Their main feature was the attempt at a more democratic way of presenting the artwork and creating conditions for its direct, institutionally unmediated encounter with potential public. But, apart from this generally accepted attitude, within this thematic group of works we could also encounter examples of socially engaged creations, which emphasized environmental problems and devastation and degradation of urban areas (actions of the art group TOK, 1972-1973), but also much more self-denying types of urban interventions (Bučan's painting of streets, chimneys, and facades, 1971-1972) and also entirely utopian projects (Trbuljak's proposal for stopping the traffic in the entire city of Zagreb and turning its streets and squares into places of artistic activity, 1971) or openly ironical and even

•
Sanja Iveković,
Traces,
 proposal for
 the urban
 intervention
 (unrealized),
 1971

Courtesy of artist

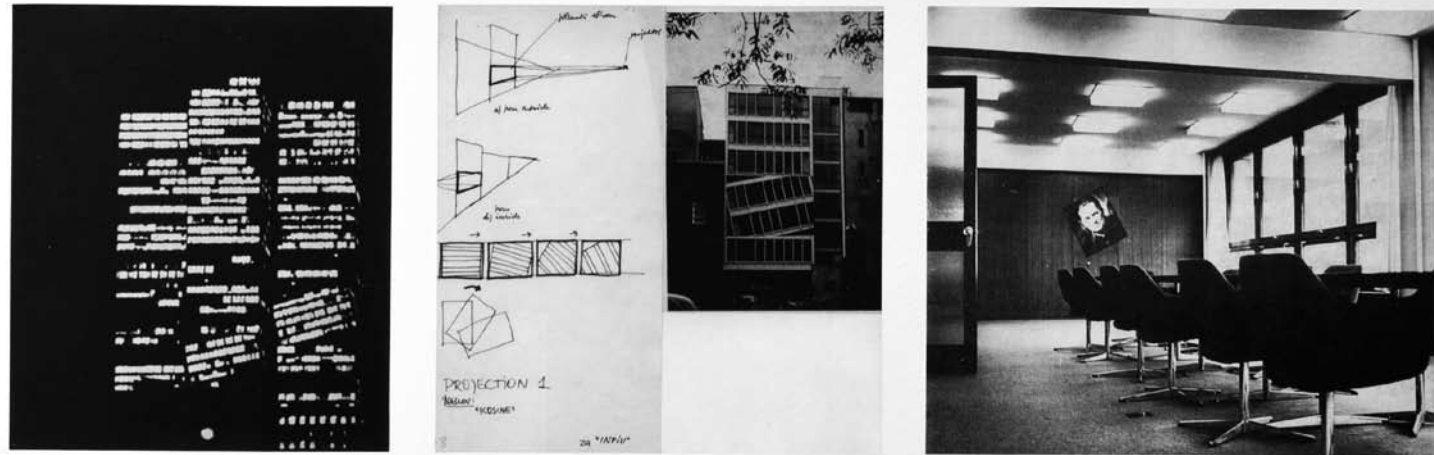
• Dalibor Martinis, poster for the exhibition *Possibilities for '71*, City Gallery of Contemporary Art, Zagreb 1971

Museum of Contemporary Art Archives, Zagreb



mogućnosti za 1971

servencije u urbanom prostoru
Zagreb 9 - 20. 6. 1971.
galeija suvremene
umjetnosti
zagreb, katarin trg 2



• politically provocative ones (proposals for unrealized urban interventions by Sanja Iveković from 1972/1973, *Disorder*, 1973). Interesting in that sense is also the work by Braco Dimitrijević, *Passers-by / Met by Chance*, realized within the section *Proposal for the 6th Zagreb Salon* in 1971. This is an almost logical continuation of his earlier projects, created in collaboration with Goran Trbuljak, with whom Dimitrijević founded the group Pensioner Tihomir Simčić in 1969.²⁶ The attempt at institutional criticism and deconstruction of different aspects of the modernist author cult, on which the collaboration of the two artists is based, started with abandoning their studios and finding an alternative location for common work. For this purpose they used the entrance passage of a residential building in Zagreb's Frankopanska Street, transformed not only in a temporary working area, but also in an improvised gallery, whose public – along with the representatives of a small group of progressive art critics – was mostly constituted by the part of urban population that rarely or never frequented official gallery venues. Starting from the postulate on formal and poetic exhaustion of modernist painting and unsustainability of the modernist myth of the unrepeatability of the artwork as a result of a unique and unrepeatable art gesture, Dimitrijević and Trbuljak formulated their new, personal concept of the artwork, according to which it can be a consequence of anybody's accidental, entirely mechanical "non-artistic" action within a certain initial, "pre-arranged" creative situation. The results of this action may have, but not necessarily, the status of artwork, which is a decision to be left to the one who performs it. Such artwork concept is matched by the new concept of artistic subject, *formerly artist*, the organizer or "arrangement-maker", who does not take either the credit or responsibility for the final outcome of the initial "creative" impulse (Dimitrijević's assistance in creation of the *Picture of Krešimir Klika*, the accidental author of the milk stain on the pavement, 1969 or Trbuljak's assistance in the creation of the *Sculpture of Tihomir Simčić*, the accidental author of the imprint of a door handle in a piece of soft clay, 1969). Apart from projects and actions of these two authors, there were other activities in the entrance passage of Frankopanska 2a, so that in 1971 the first international exhibition of conceptual art in Croatia was held there, entitled *At the Moment*. It was organised by Braco and Nena Dimitrijević. For a few hours they exhibited works by Joseph Beuys, Victor Burgin, Janis Kounellis, Sol LeWitt, Jan Dibbets, *OHO* group, Douglas Hubler, Daniel Buren, and many other European artists, completely unknown to local public.²⁷ Almost simultaneously to this exhibition, Dimitrijević's artistic activity, that up to that point included elements of happening, land art, and arte povera, became much narrower in terms of media, so that

Courtesy of artist



• Partial reconstruction of the exhibition *At Another Moment*, Student Cultural Centre Gallery, Belgrade 1971 (curators Braco i Nena Dimitrijević)

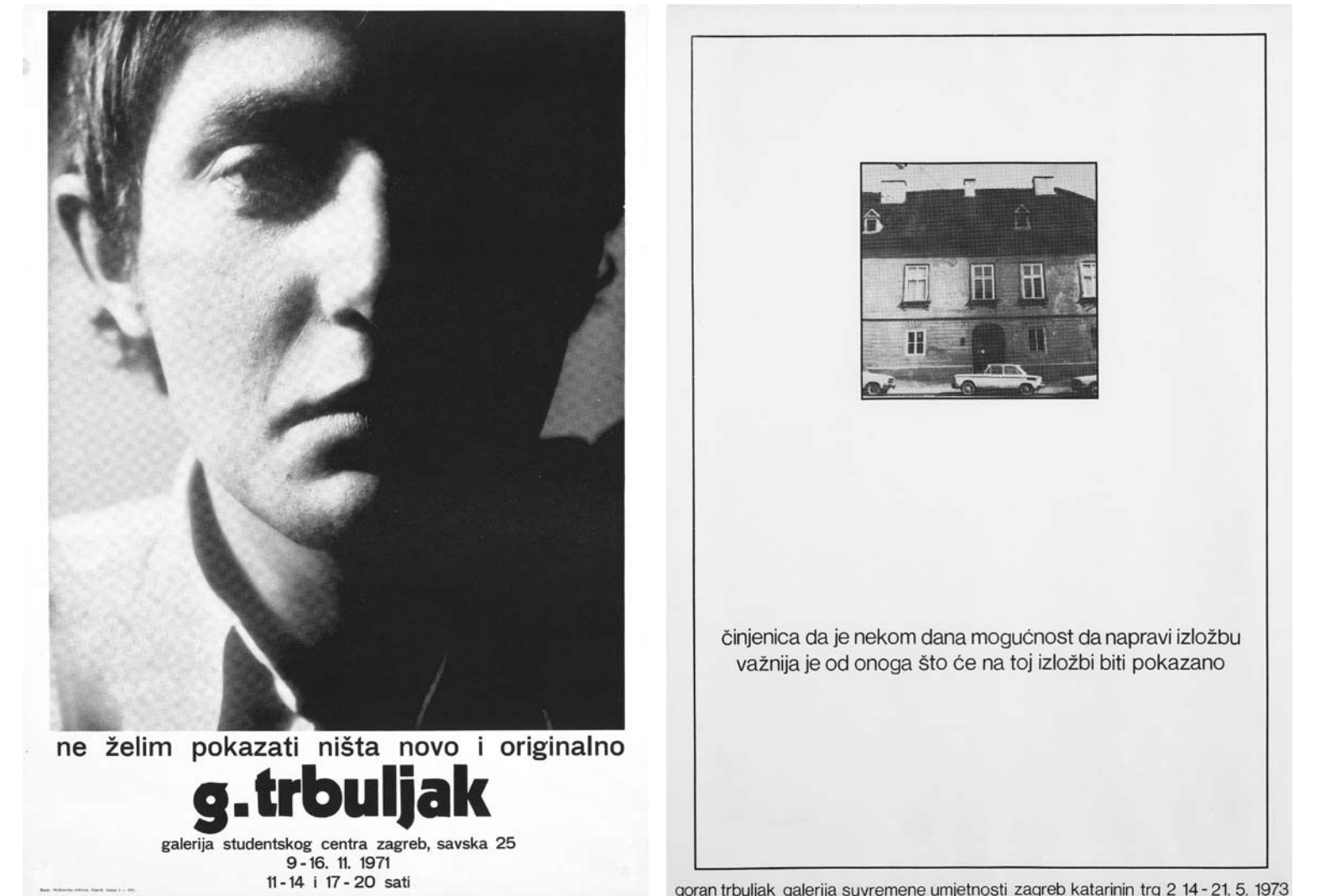
View of the exhibition *Socialism and Modernity*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb 2011-2012 (photo Paolo Mofardin)



- he – apart from a short excursion into the field of video-art – mostly limited himself to text and photography that he used for the already mentioned work *Passers-by / Met by Chance*, shown at the 6th Zagreb Salon in 1971. It shows enhanced photographs of persons the author has accidentally met, accompanied by the date and the exact time of the encounter, mounted on the facades around Zagreb's main square. In then very tense political situation, Dimitrijević's work was undoubtedly subversive, because he played with and evaded the usual and expected political propaganda impact accompanying such use of public space. This aspect of its meaning should be supplemented by many other aspects – from the problem of ideological conditioning of collective memory and changeable hierarchy of social values to the problem of how convincing historical narratives were; this became an increasingly important issue both in the Yugoslav and in the majority of other European societies. *Passers-by / met by chance*, as well as Goran Trbuljak's first solo exhibition in the Students' Centre Gallery, reduced only to the poster with basic information on its venue and time, a photograph of the author and the text "I do not want to show anything new or original" clearly point to basic problems that would remain intriguing to both artists in the years to come. Thus after leaving Croatia in 1972, Dimitrijević was increasingly focused on the questions of ideological construction and instrumentalisation of history, the functioning principles of the art world, the problem of historicisation of the artwork and circumstances that determine its position, both in the art history and today's contemporary culture. The series of works/actions *Random Passer-*

Braco Dimitrijević, *This could be a place of historical importance, 1973-1974*

Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb



by, which after Zagreb he continued by similar or identical works in many European cities, brought him within a short period of time an almost stellar status on the international visual art scene and much better working conditions than the ones other artists of his generation worked in during the 70s.

Unlike Dimitrijević, with the exception of his Paris excursions in 1973 and 1974 and intensive collaboration with Ida Biard on the project *Galerie des Locateurs*, one of the radical examples of resistance to international art establishment, Trbuljak remained closely connected with the local scene. He would direct his creative energy at one of the most complex examples of institutional criticism in Croatian contemporary art, which in its systematic approach, intelligence and convincing qualities by far outreached local boundaries. In his works like the anthological *Referendum* from 1972, when he distributed an opinion poll leaf with the assertion "Artist is everyone who gets a chance for that from the society", asking random passers-by to decide if they considered Goran Trbuljak an artist, or the opinion polls from the period 1972-1974 among the famous Paris gallery owners, in which he examined the differences in social and institutional perception of categories of anonymous and young, not yet renowned artist. Trbuljak would point at the dominant position of the modernist system of art values and the fact that in its background are the interests of museum and gallery institutions, art market, and all other segments of the institutional structure of the art world, from whose synergic actions emerged the decision of what was and what was not a work of art, i.e. who was and who was not an artist. Anticipating Bourdieu's explanations of the

• **Goran Trbuljak, poster/exhibition - *I do not want to show anything new and original, Student Centre Gallery, Zagreb 1971***

Students Centre Gallery Archives, Zagreb

• **Goran Trbuljak, poster/exhibition - *The fact that someone has a chance to make an exhibition is more important than what will be exhibited at that exhibition, Gallery of Contemporary Art, Zagreb 1973***

Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb

• Goran Trbuljak, poster/exhibition - *With this exhibition I am retaining continuity of my work*, Gallery of Contemporary Art, Zagreb 1979

Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb

OVOM IZLOŽBOM ODRŽAVAM KONTINUITET U SVOM RADU

goran trbuljak 12. IV – 27. IV. 1979. galerija suvremene umjetnosti studio zagreb, katarinin trg 2

• Goran Trbuljak, poster/exhibition Retrospective - *I do not want to show anything new and original; the fact that someone has a chance to make an exhibition is more important than what will be exhibited at that exhibition; with this exhibition I am retaining continuity of my work*, Museum of Contemporary art, Belgrade 1981

Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb

RETROSPEKTIVA

Ne želim pokazati ništa novo i originalno¹, činjenica da je nekom dana mogućnost da napravi izložbu važnija je od onoga što će na toj izložbi biti pokazano²; ovom izložbom održavam kontinuitet u svom radu.³

1. Galerija Studentskog Centra, Studeni 1971, Zagreb 2. Galerija Suvremene umjetnosti, Maj 1973, Zagreb 3. Studio GS U, Travanj 1979, Zagreb

Goran Trbuljak Salon Muzeja savremene umetnosti Pariska 14, Beograd 4 – 22. decembar 1981. godine

terms social and symbolic capital²⁸, in the mentioned works Trbuljak tackled a number of important questions related to social circumstances of reception and evaluation of the artwork, which are still today – or especially today – equally interesting. A critical and ironical approach to different aspects of institutionalization of art would remain a constant of his artistic activity, which is visible also from Trbuljak's retrospective exhibition from 1981, consisting of posters-exhibits from his previous solo appearances, entitled: *I do not want to show anything new and original* (1971), *The fact that someone has been enabled to mount an exhibition is more important than that which will be shown at that exhibition* (1973), *With this exhibition I maintain continuity in my work* (1979). All

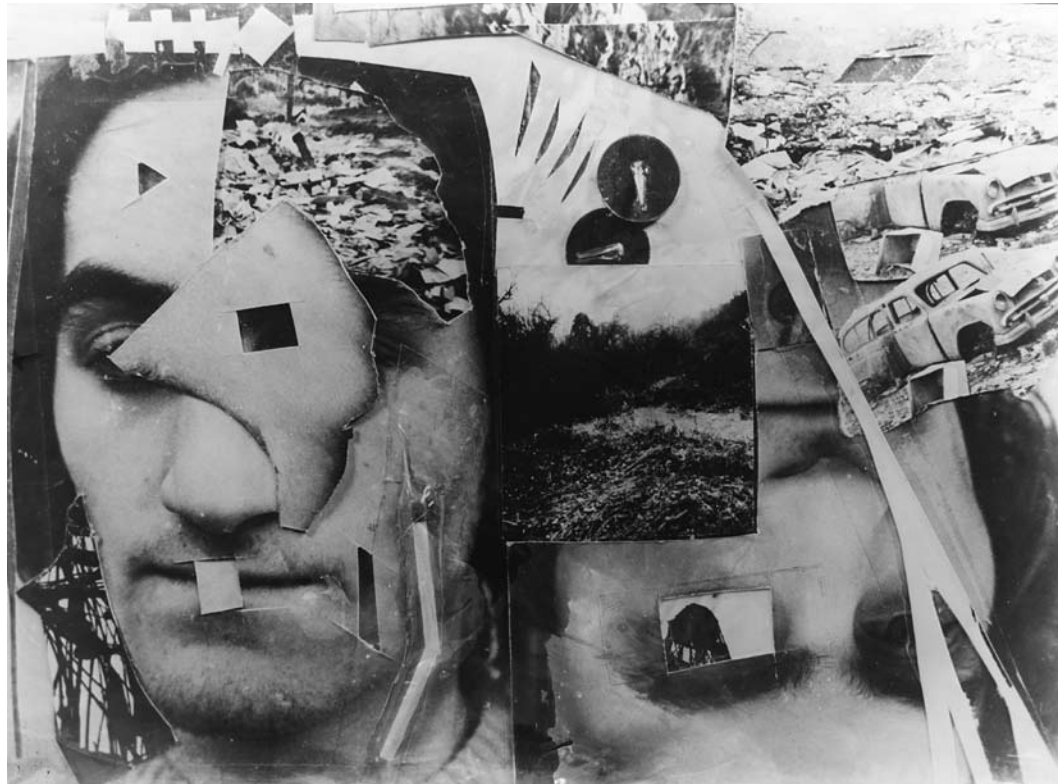
four works/exhibitions are parts of the same, probably most consequentially realized individual art program from the context of new art practice on the entire Croatian/Yugoslav cultural territory of the 70s. Trbuljak's problem constancy is illustrated also by the work displayed at the Venice Biennale in 2005, by which the artist discreetly, but in critical terms devastatingly refers to the fact that his works were omitted from the Yugoslav selection, shown at the same art event in 1976.

Apart from spatial interventions, theoretical analyses of the language, and examination of the tension between the word and image, between verbal and visual signifying systems, and different modalities of institutional criticism and critical analysis of the social role of art, a very important segment of *new art practice* is video art. Although first video-works date from an early period, the very beginning of the 70s (B. Dimitrijević, *Metabolism as Bodily Structure, Thinking Process as Bodily Sculpture*, both from 1971), the lack of necessary video-equipment would result in a very modest art production, which, actually, would not turn essentially larger all the way until mid-nineties. The majority of video-works of the first half of the 70s would therefore emerge within the framework of international art events, among which the most important one was certainly the exhibition *Audiovisuelle Botschaften*, held in Graz 1973 (as part of *Trigon '73*). Thanks to the decision of the exhibition commissioner Vera Horvat-Pintarić, a relatively large number of Croatian/Yugoslav artists were given a chance to create their first video works. A special place in this group would be taken by Sanja Iveković and Dalibor Martinis, video pioneers in Croatian contemporary art, whose first joint work in that medium, the video *TVTimer* (1973) consists of twenty one-minute interventions into the official program of Austrian television, i.e. of juxtaposition of public discourse and private video-sequences and of simultaneous examination of technical and semantic characteristics of these two electronic image media. The work *TVTimer* has outlined the basic direction of explorations within this segment of new art practice, dominant until the mid-seventies (Sanja Iveković *Dawn, Sweet Violence, Looking at...*, all the works from 1974; Dalibor Martinis *Still Life*, 1973), but it also very clearly indicates the possible role of video technology in the emancipation of other forms of expression, until then infrequently represented on the Croatian visual art scene. This primarily refers to the art of performance, which would to a great extent, thanks to the work of these two artists, especially Sanja Iveković, from the 70s onwards become an increasingly common and more complex way of artistic activity in media terms.

Abandoning of the pronouncedly analytical approach to the video medium and concentration on its ability to record personal states, as well as very subtle intimate nuances of human and gender interrelations, indicates one of the more radical turns within the entire complex of new art practice, which would take place by the mid-seventies. What happened was a certain shift in sensibility, connected with the emergence of the second generation of conceptual artists who favoured very individualised personal projections of reality, obliterated the boundaries between the private and the public, and neither expected nor required a social confirmation of their status; they mostly had no formal art education and presented their works, frequently realised in the "poor" media of text and photography, through street actions, through immediate contact with the public. This methodological, problem, and even world view related turnover was directly linked with the *Group of Six Authors* (Željko Jerman, Mladen Stilinović, Sven Stilinović, Vladimir Martek, Fedor Vučemilović, and Boris Demur), formed in May of 1975. This was a group of pronounced artist individualities, which inaugurated an entirely new type of sensitivity (works by Željko Jerman), but also an uncompromising model of critique that from the field of art very soon spread to the entire social system and acquired clear and unambiguous political connotations (works by Mladen Stilinović). The activity

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Sven Stilinović,
Collage,
1974

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of this group of authors, with the time expanded and transformed into *Artists' Working Community*, would mark a kind of end to all utopian projections of art as a driver of social changes and all illusions about the bright future of the socialist project. Their work methods would prove much more radical from the viewpoint of system critique and much more devastating than anything previously happening on the local visual art scene. Along the partition line between official and alternative culture, by mid-seventies it started an accelerated changing process as well. In the period "after modernism" the division between these two fields of cultural production became not only entirely clear, but – in a way – final. Almost everything vital on the Yugoslav cultural and art scene gradually took refuge within the boundaries of alternative culture, which in a much more direct way brought all conflicts, aporias, and problems of self-governing socialism to daylight. Since the end of the 60s they gradually became larger and the gap "between the ideological signifier and the social referent"²⁹ increasingly deeper. Already by the end of the next decade it was clear that nothing would be able to bridge it.

•
Željko Jerman,
*With a Little Help
of My Friends*,
1972

Museum of Modern
and Contemporary Art



• **Mladen Stilinović, Collages, 1972**

View of the exhibition *Socialism and Modernity*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb 2011-2012 (photo Paolo Mofardin)



1 An example of such debate in local conditions is the famous "Ritz Bar discussion" that took place in 1953 between members of EXAT '51, art critics, and representatives/advocates of high modernist abstraction. Motive for organizing a debate was a fresco painting by Edo Murtić made a few months earlier during the refurbishment of the Ritz-bar, which, in the opinion of EXAT artists, was an exemplary of how modernity could be miss understood and miss interpreted.

2 This statement was partly taken over from Miško Šuvaković's "Introduction" to the book *Impossible Historic Avant-Gardes, Neo-Avant-Gardes, and Post-Avant-Gardes in Yugoslavia, 1918-1991*, Dubravka Đurić, Miško Šuvaković (eds.), Chicago: MIT Press, 2003:7; Šuvaković using this statement in his discussion on the meaning of the term "Yugoslav cultural space".

3 Zoran Markuš, "Likovna kritika u Srbiji šeste decenije", in: *Jugoslavenska umetnost šeste decenije*, exhibition catalogue, Belgrade: MSU, 1980: 52-57.

4 The Department of Art History of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Belgrade was established only in 1946. Therefore, post-war art critics in Serbia come from different professions – from literature to law. From today's point of view it seems as that the lack of professionally educated progressive young art critics, as were Putar, Bašičević or Vižintin in Croatia, together with greater influence of the pre-war generation of artists critically determined the course of events in post-war Serbian art.

5 The Civic Gallery of Contemporary Art, founded in 1954 with the aim of promoting contemporary art, was another result of the reconstruction of modernism. All until the establishment of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade in 1965, it was the only institution of its kind, not only in Yugoslavia, but in all socialist countries of the time. Throughout the entire second half of the 20th century, the Gallery, which in the late eighties became the Museum of Contemporary Art, consistently fulfilled its initial role and acted as the most active advocate, promoter, and organiser of contemporary artistic production.

6 The information conveyed by Ivan Picelj in his reminiscence on the organisation of this exhibition, published in the catalogue to the exhibition *Političke prakse (post)jugoslavenske umjetnosti: retrospektive 07*, held in 2010 at the History Museum in Belgrade.

7 Both statements are cited from the typewritten text from the panel board 88.

8 The "Americanisation" of post-war art does not only assume the transformation of New York into a world centre of post-war modernism, but also the powerful influence of American abstraction, primarily abstract expressionism on the European visual art scene. However, from the point of view of post-war art of most middle and eastern European countries, such claim does not seem particularly convincing.

9 For a broader elaboration of the meaning of EXAT and its break-up with the figurative tradition of the environment, see Jerko Denegri, *Umjetnost konstruktivnog pristupa, EXAT '51 i Nove Tendencije*, Zagreb: Horetzky, 2004.

10 After the return in Zagreb, chests with the materials of the *Didactic Exhibition* were stored in the City Gallery of Contemporary Art, where they remained until the institution (now Museum of Contemporary Art) was moved to the new location in Novi Zagreb. Marija Gattin, who was a head of the Documentation and Information Department until July 2010 and one of rare museum's curators who was well acquainted with the content and the value of these materials, transferred them to the new space where they were preserved mainly thanks to her knowledge and insight. Premature death prevented Gattin from reconstructing the *Didactic Exhibition* and presenting it to today's public. Her work was continued by the current head of the Documentation and Information Department of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Jadranka Vinterhalter. Thanks to Ms Vinterhalter efforts and the efforts of the Museum's conservation department, the panels were restored and in a very short period of time prepared for the exhibition *Socialism and Modernity*.

11 The result of such a decision was the most successful Yugoslav presentation at the Venice Biennale in 1950s. Sculptor Vojin Bakić was shortlisted for the Biennale Grand Prix, while Vera Horvat-Pintarić won the art critics' honorary charter for her text on Piet Mondrian.

12 On the relationship between the socialist State and modern art, from the point of view of its politically representative role, see Ljiljana Kolečnik, "Prilozi interpretaciji hrvatske umjetnosti 50-ih godina, Prikaz formativne faze odnosa moderne umjetnosti i socijalističke Države", *Radovi IPU*, 29, Zagreb 2005: 307-315.

13 For a broader explanation of Informal Art in Serbia, see Lidija Merenik, *Ideološki modeli: srpsko slikarstvo 1945-1968*, Beograd: Beopolis, 2001.

14 Jerko Denegri, *Apstraktna umjetnost u Hrvatskoj I*, Split: Logos, 1983: 23.

15 The starting point in the recognition of *Gorgona's* art was the retrospective exhibition of the Group, held at the Gallery of Contemporary Art Zagreb in 1977. The credit for the initial interpretation of *Gorgona's* visual art production and the organisation of the mentioned retrospective exhibition must be given to art critic Nena Dimitrijević (then Baljković).

16 Ješa Denegri, "Istorijske avangarde i nova umetnička praksa", *Književna reč* 159, Belgrade 25/1/1981: 8.

17 More about the cultural context, cultural policies, and political events in Yugoslavia of the 60s in Ljiljana Kolečnik, "A Decade of Freedom, Hope and Lost Illusions. Yugoslav Society in the 1960s as a Framework for New Tendencies", *IPU Working Papers*, 34, Zagreb, 2010: 314-332.

18 Matko Meštrović, "Ideologija Novih Tendencija", in M. Meštrović, *Od pojedinačnog ka općem*, Zagreb: Mladost, 1967: 215.

19 The term "interaction" was for the first time used in its today's meaning during the Zagreb colloquium *Computers and Visual Research* in 1968, where it was discussed in exactly that sense.

20 Miško Šuvaković, "Nove tendencije", in M. Šuvaković, *Pojmovnik suvremene umjetnosti*, Zagreb. Ghent: Horetzky, Vlees & Beton, 2005: 421.

21 The term *new art practice* was for the first time used by French critic Catherine Millet by the end of the 60s. It was introduced into Yugoslav art criticism and historiography of art by Ješa Denegri, see Catherine Millet, "Konceptualna umjetnost kao semiotika umjetnosti", *Polja* 156, Novi Sad, 1976: 3-6.

22 Issue 156 of the magazine *Polja* from 1976 was entirely devoted to conceptual art and it was the first complex information on this visual art phenomenon in Yugoslav cultural space.

23 Nebojša Milenković, "Umetnost kao istraživanje umjetnosti", in *Centralno evropski aspekti vojvođanskih avangardi*, exhibition catalogue, Novi Sad: Muzej savremene umjetnosti, 2002: 93.

24 This is about the discontinuation of the *Uy Symposion* magazine because of Miroslav Mandić's *Poem about Film* (criticism on throwing money on monumental film projects like *Battle of Sutjeska* emphasising the cult of Tito's personality), which resulted in indictment and a nine months' prison sentence. The other law suit was conducted against Slavko Bogdanović because of his poem *Pesma underground Tribina mladih*, published in Belgrade magazine *Student*, in which the (expected) destiny of Tribina mladih is described in a rather sinister way. The ensuing trial resulted in a conviction to eight months imprisonment. Apart from social isolation, the unavoidable consequence of such politically motivated trials was the termination of artistic activity, as it happened in the case of Slavko Matković.

25 Davor Matičević, "Hrvatska umjetnost 70ih", in *Inovacija u hrvatskoj umjetnosti*, exhibition catalogue, Zagreb: Gallery of Contemporary Art, 1983: 21-34.

26 We based our interpretation of early works by Braco Dimitrijević and Goran Trbuljak on following sources: ***(1969), "Slobodan Braco Dimitrijević", *Novine Galerije Studentskog Centra*, 12, Zagreb, 1969/1970; Nena Baljković, "Primjeri konceptualne umjetnosti", *Studentski list*, Zagreb, 27 Oct. 1970; Nena Baljković, "Ljetni projekti 4+1", *Omladinski tjednik*, Zagreb, 28 Oct. 1970; Nena Baljković, "Prolaznici stvaraju – izložba Gorana Trbuljaka u veži Frankopanska 2a", *Omladinski tjednik*, Zagreb, 17 Feb. 1971; Tonko Maroević, "Sadržaj praznine", *Telegram*, 19 Nov. 1971: 7; Želimir Košćević, "Istina o Goranu Trbuljaku", *Telegram*, 48, Zagreb, Apr. 1972: 6; Ješa Denegri, "Braco Dimitrijević", *Polja*, 146, Novi Sad, 1975; Nena Baljković (Dimitrijević), "Braco Dimitrijević, Goran Trbuljak, Grupa šestorice autora", in *Nova umjetnička praksa*, exhibition catalogue, Zagreb: Galerije grada Zagreba, 1978: 29; Želimir Košćević, "Referendum Gorana Trbuljaka", in Ž. Košćević, *Ispitivanje međuprostora*, Zagreb: CKD SSO, 1978; Jadranko Sinković, "Goran Trbuljak: Ne želim biti u ladici sistema", *Vjesnik* (special issue 7 dana), 1979; Marijan Susovski, "Uvod", in *Inovacije u hrvatskoj umjetnosti sedamdesetih godina*, exhibition catalogue, Zagreb: Galerija suvremene umjetnosti, 1982: 17-41; Želimir Košćević, "Umjetničke grupe u posljednjoj Hrvatskoj", *Život umjetnosti*, 43/44, Zagreb, 1988; Ješa Denegri, "Goran Trbuljak ili pitanje o granicama umjetnikovog ponašanja", *Telegram*, 67, Zagreb, 12 Jan. 1973 (reprinted in Ješa Denegri, *Studentski kulturni centar kao umetnička scena*, Beograd: SKC, 2003: 42); Ješa Denegri, "Koncepti Gorana Trbuljaka", *Polja*, 149, Novi Sad, 1971 (reprinted in Ješa Denegri, *Razlozi za drugu liniju – za novu umetnost sedamdesetih*, Biblioteka Matice srpske, Novi Sad, 2007: 424).

27 Braco and Nena Dimitrijević organized the international exhibition of conceptual art *At the Moment* in April of 1971 in the entrance passage of Frankopanska 2a in Zagreb. The exhibition lasted only three hours and attracted a large number of accidental and intentional visitors. According to the photo-documentation of this event from the Archives of Marinko Sudac Collection, along with colleagues from Dimitrijević's generation, among the viewers there was a number of renowned art critics, as - for example - Radoslav Putar. The exhibition was shown for the second time in September of the same year in Belgrade's SKCU Gallery, this time under the title *At Another Moment*. The portfolio with reproductions of the displayed works issued on that occasion was edited by Dunja Blažević.

28 *Social capital* would be the outcome of our social interactions and would presume a certain benefit that we draw from such interactions/relations, no matter if it assumes the collaboration with other people (groups) or privileged treatment that we have achieved by "networking" within a certain social sphere (e.g. within the museum and gallery system or the infrastructure of the art market); *symbolic capital* functions as "embodiment" of cultural capital and refers to the situation in which our prestigious social position, social prominence or previous achievements ensure us the access to certain resources that would otherwise not be at our disposal. See: Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Rutledge, London, 1984.

29 Aleš Erjavec et al., *Postmodernism and Postsocialist Condition*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2003: 137.