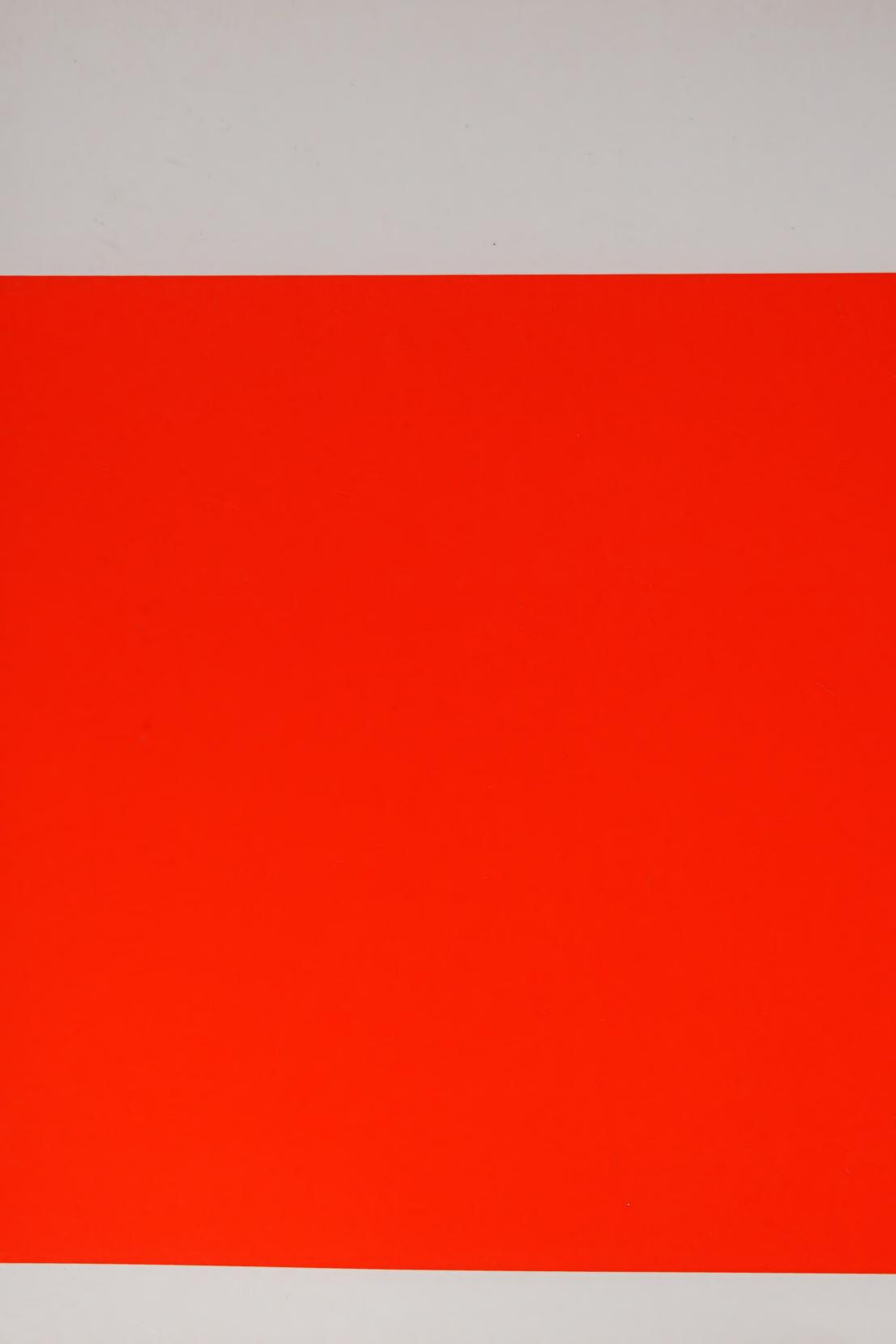


EAST ART MAP

Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe



Edited by IRWIN



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70⁰⁰

Edited by IRWIN

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EAST ART MAP

Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe

An Afterall Book

Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design

University of the Arts London

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Foreword

Charles Esche

This is the first appearance of what we believe will be a significant addition to publishing about art and its wider context — Afterall Books. The idea for an extended imprint grew out of our experiences with Afterall journal, first published in 1999 by Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design and subsequently co-published with California Institute of the Arts. The journal has established itself as a site for a wide reflection on art and its impact on social, cultural and political issues. It is a strictly organised publication featuring the work of five artists per issue published twice a year.

As the journal developed, it became clear to us that we needed other formats and structures in order to distribute the ideas emerging within Afterall's network of writers and artists. Thus we began to think about new kinds of books that would still retain the basic focus of Afterall on the work of art itself and its impact in the wider world. In this way Afterall Books was born as an initiative of Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design.

There are two planned strands to Afterall Books. One is a series of survey publications that aim to look at currently significant areas of modern and contemporary art practice through the commissioning and reprinting of key texts. The second is a series of small publications that will, over time, form a uniformly designed library of books focused upon important single works of art. Each series will develop its own momentum, the first will be more eclectic, responding to the passions of the writers and editors, the latter more structured and delivering ultimately a new kind of canon — one subject to change and interrogation through each new addition.

East Art Map: Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe is the first of the surveys to be published. It will be followed by: Art and the Moving Image, edited by Tanya Leighton; Art and Social Change, edited by Will Bradley and Charles Esche and Art and Psychedelic Culture edited by Lars Bang Larsen. Each of these publications will have its own character. None is attempting to be comprehensive, but rather each offers a subjective insight from the editors' point of view about a topic that we feel needs to be addressed today. If art is to have purchase on how the world is perceived, then it needs to be written about with both seriousness and personal commitment. We would like to offer something that points towards art as a way to bring about change, effecting people's sense of themselves and their surroundings and creating the possibility for things to be otherwise.

We live at a time when our imagination of the future is perhaps weaker and more restricted than it has been before, at least in living memory. Art is

one of a very few forums where we can publicly exchange our unreasonable dreams and impractical proposals. Afterall Books will underwrite this possibility by investigating what we can learn from arts recent history.

East Art Map: Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe looks specifically at a part of the world where rapid and massive change in political and economic dogma has effected cultural production in different ways. In some ways, the history of art from Eastern Europe is still being discovered and we hope this publication will add to our knowledge of particular national developments. Ultimately, however, this book can be seen as a guidebook on how, as an artist, to steer a path through totalitarian and post-totalitarian societies, how to pass comment without incurring the wrath of the government or powers-that-be. As such, it is a timely publication, one that teaches ways of being in the present moment, as much as it describes a historical condition.

General Introduction

IRWIN

This book is the culmination of more than a decade of activities by the group IRWIN dedicated to the question of Eastern European art and its status. The *East Art Map* project evolved over two phases, the first extending from 1999 to 2002, and the second from 2002 to 2005. This book likewise comprises two sections. In the first, a map is unveiled which presents, in a clear and transparent way, art production that occurred in the territory of Eastern Europe from 1945 to the present. In the second section a compilation of commissioned and republished essays attempts to illuminate specific relevant issues and address a number of questions that arose as we explored the art and art system (or rather, art systems) of Eastern Europe.

*East Art Map I*¹

A (Re)Construction of the History of Contemporary Art in Eastern Europe

Created in collaboration with the following contributing editors: Inke Arns, Vladimir Beskid, Iara Boubnova, Călin Dan, Ekaterina Degot, Branko Dimitrijević, Lilia Dragneva, Marina Gržinić, Sirje Helme, Marina Koldobskaya, Solvita Krese, Elona Lubyte, Suzana Milevska, Viktor Misiano, Edi Muka, Ana Peraica, Piotr Piotrowski, Branka Stipančić, Jana and Jiří Ševčík, János Sugár, Miško Šuvaković, Mara Traumane, Igor Zabel and Nermina Zildžo.²

In Eastern Europe (also known as the former communist countries of Europe, Eastern and Central Europe, the New Europe, etc.), there are, as a rule, no transparent structures organising the kind of referential system for the art-historically significant events, artefacts and artists that would be accepted and respected outside the borders of a given country. What we encounter instead are systems closed within national borders, most often based on a rationale adapted to local needs. At times there are even double systems in which we find, alongside 'official' art histories, a whole series of stories and legends about the art and artists who were opposed to the official art establishment. But written records on the latter are few and fragmented. In addition, comparisons with the art and artists operating in the West at the same time are extremely rare.

This kind of fragmented system poses several problems. First of all, it prevents any serious comprehension of the art as a whole that was created during socialist times. Second, it represents a huge impediment for artists, who, deprived of any solid support for their activities, are compelled to steer between the local and international art systems. And third, it presents a major block to communication among artists, critics and theoreticians from these countries.

Eastern European art thus requires an in-depth study that will chart its developments, explain its complexities, and situate it in the wider context. But it seems that the very magnitude of such a project dooms its realisation from the start, so when we insist on a complex presentation of this art, free from oversimplification, what we get, inadvertently, is no presentation at all. Consequently, it has been very difficult, if not impossible, to find one's orientation in this area.

The aim of *East Art Map* (EAM) is to present art from the whole space of Eastern Europe, taking artists out of their national frameworks and presenting them in a unified scheme. We do not seek to establish some ultimate truth; on the contrary, our aims are much more modest and, we hope, more practical: to organise the fundamental relationships between Eastern European artists where these relations have not been organised, to draw a map and create a table.

Today, the use of a table to categorise art — the legacy of a neo-classicism that has long since been transcended — is rightly seen as restrictive and, more importantly, inadequate. And yet paradoxically, the table, with its roots in classicism, is still a key orientation tool, even in the field of art. We fully expect, then, that *East Art Map* will give rise to various debates and arguments showing how this or that artist transcends such arbitrary placement or categorisation — in other words, both the reproaches that are justly due such tables and the kind of useful overviews they can actually facilitate.

IRWIN, 2001

How to Read the Map

There is, on the local level, a memory or awareness about the events and personalities that have influenced the development of art in these territories. But given that prior to *East Art Map* no such maps have been made, at least as far as we know, we invited experts from various countries to collaborate on the project.³ In the course of our twenty years of activity we have established contacts with artists and writers on art from many different places in Eastern Europe. This experience enabled us to invite a circle of eminent art critics, curators and artists to present up to ten crucial art projects from their respective countries over the past sixty years. The choice of specific artworks and events, as well as how they and their creators were presented, was always left exclusively to the individual selector (who sometimes chose to supplement the selection with a broader-ranging discussion of the specific context of the individual country).⁴

East Art Map has been organised according to the following rules. It does not attempt to provide detailed explanations of individual works of art or of the relationships between them, but rather is limited to presenting the following information:

- 1 Key artistic events or artworks that have affected art practice in particular countries, along with a brief description of these.
- 2 The reasons why these events and artefacts had such an impact and the kind of reflection and thinking about art, or through art, that made them possible.
- 3 The date of their occurrence or creation and documentation where available.
- 4 Their relationship (similarities and differences) with regard to contemporary international art practice.

On the enclosed map (see insert) the basic elements of the system are defined as artists, events and other artistic phenomena. Each of the selected artists/events/phenomena is represented by a ball. If a particular artist is chosen more than once (if, for example, two or more works by a single artist are selected by one or more selectors), this artist is inscribed in the system only once but is represented by a full presentation of as many works as were chosen.

Because the selections are based on the choice of crucial works or events, the date in which a chosen work or event was executed or occurred is also the position of that chosen artist on a timeline. In the event that more than one work by a single artist is chosen, the artist is placed on the timeline according to the date on which the earliest of the selected works was executed.

The contributing editors were asked not only to select up to ten crucial artworks or moments, but also to note and define the influences and relationships between selected artists, both locally and internationally. All the relations that can be discerned from the information provided are inscribed as red lines that connect specific entries on the map. All selections have been made in accordance with the principles of the project, through the choice of separate key events, projects, artists or institutions. For example, the text by Ana Peraica presents the thesis that there has been a continual re-occurrence of anonymous authorship in the contemporary history of Croatian art, and this idea forms the basis of her selection.

One of the main ambitions of the EAM project is to assist in establishing a field that will facilitate communication in various parts of the ex-socialist world and lead to the detection and inscription of lines of development for specific themes. We expect to be able to inscribe several new lines in EAM as the project progresses. In addition to the line of anonymous authorship, we were also able to trace the line of Moscow Conceptualism, the line of Sots-Art and the line of the retro-avant-garde — the construction of which has long been the focus of IRWIN's activities. All the lines that describe these broader movements are presented in blue on the map.

*East Art Map II*⁵

This part of the EAM project is concerned with verifying and objectifying the results obtained in the first phase. This part consists of (a) a website;⁶ (b) research in conjunction with a network of universities;⁷ (c) research and reflection by experts on the relationship between Eastern and Western art production; and (d) the exhibition *East Art Museum*.⁸

In the process of organising the EAM, a number of features emerged that seem to characterise the workings of the art system in the region we commonly call Eastern Europe. We would like to draw attention to two such features, which are interconnected and bear special relevance for the future development of the project.

First, although we asked our selectors to describe their chosen artists and works in relation to both local and international artistic production, only a few of them actually did this. Second, the criteria they used for selecting the artists were entirely heterogeneous. In fact, we were not surprised by either of these tendencies. The decades-long legacy of having art systems confined within the borders of a single country is not one that encourages great leaps. Understandably, the delicate operation of making international comparisons based on clearly defined criteria demands a certain amount of time, with gradual advances and a good measure of diplomatic tact; such an endeavour, undoubtedly, goes beyond both the content and spatial scope of the present project. This would explain the selectors' reluctance

to situate a chosen artist in relation to the art being produced at the same time in the West. But here we have the crux of the matter.

In only a few cases has the art production of the East been reflected in any relationship to concurrent Western production. This holds true — although for different reasons — not only for local Eastern experts, but also for Western experts, who as a rule have limited themselves to comparisons with Western artists. If one can say that great progress has been made recently in the area of exhibitions in which artists from the East are presented along with Western artists, this is not the case at all when it comes to a reflection on art from Eastern Europe. While it is true that a number of catalogues and books dedicated to various aspects of the contemporary art of the East have recently appeared, rather little has been done in the way of making serious comparisons between the Eastern and Western European context for art production. In this area, a no man's land continues to exist that divides one half of the continent from the other.

For this reason, we decided to ask experts from both East and West to provide us with substantial texts that deal with concrete comparisons between the art of the two regions or lay the groundwork for such comparisons. Although we could not avoid general themes (nor did we want to), the majority of these texts are devoted to concrete and clearly defined specific questions, or to views that, each in its own way, transgress the 'quarantine of non-communication', as Rastko Močnik puts it. Clearly, of course, the selection of some of the artists discussed could have been entirely different and, in this sense, is merely arbitrary, but in saying this we in no way want to diminish their relevance. If in creating *East Art Map* we wished to present the whole, our concern in the essay section was the very opposite. Instead of the kind of general texts on the topic of the East that have, in recent years, appeared rather frequently, we wanted to have concrete texts; instead of a discussion about principles, we wanted a discussion about particulars. It's not that we don't appreciate the first sort of writing, but we are of the opinion that only through the regular practice of concrete comparison will it be possible to weave a network of communication. Thus, we do not expect these texts to compensate for the lack of research in this area. Rather, we see them as examples that suggest possible themes for future exploration in the attempt to pave a way across this no man's land — to challenge this tacit agreement not to intervene in the interpretation and discussion of the recent art production in other countries, both among Eastern European experts in regard to countries other than their own, and among Western experts in regard to the art of the East as a whole.

We are very grateful for the co-operation and good will of all our collaborators, both the selectors and the essay writers. It is a simple fact that the EAM project would have been impossible without their readiness to participate.

By the same token, we would also like to thank Dragan Sakan and Katrin Klingan. Without their help, the project would never have got off the ground. Dragan Sakan, the publisher of *New Moment*, sponsored the first phase of the project with his own private resources, while it was the understanding and support of Katrin Klingan, artistic director of relations, that made the continuation of the project possible, allowing it to be realised on an entirely new level.

IRWIN, 2005

- 1 The first part of East Art Map was realised in 2001 in collaboration with New Moment magazine. An entire issue was dedicated to the East Art Map. We combined the separate selections into a whole so as to make a comparative view of the material, presented in the form of a map. Short descriptions of the particular artists/events were extracted from the contributing editors' texts by Livia Páldi. In late 2002, a CD-ROM of East Art Map was published by IRWIN in conjunction with Renderspace-Pristop Interactive and the Karl Ernst Osthaus-Museum (KEOM), in Hagen, Germany (a draft version of this CD-ROM was presented as part of the Museutopia exhibition at KEOM in June 2002).
- 2 All of the artist selections that have gone into EAM were made in 2001 except for the selections made by Lilia Dragneva (Moldova), who was invited to participate when the project was already in its second phase, and the selections we received through the EAM website. Although initially we thought it would be possible to cover the territory of the entire former Soviet Union with the help of selectors in Moscow and St. Petersburg, we later realised this was not the best approach. Thus we asked Sirje Helme to participate (for the Baltic states) and then later, Lilia Dragneva for Moldova. We also made arrangements for a selector from the Ukraine, a country that is clearly poorly represented here, but despite our best efforts, this selection was not realised. A selection of works proposed by visitors to the website EAM Online was finalised and confirmed by a committee consisting of Anda Rottenberg, Ješa Denegri, Lia Perjovschi, Georg Schöllhammer and Christoph Tannert.
- 3 One inconsistency, which we were guilty of from the start, is the fact that we commissioned two selectors from each of the countries of Serbia and Montenegro, Croatia, and Slovenia; this resulted in a disproportional number of works from these countries being included in EAM. Undoubtedly, we made this mistake partly for sentimental reasons, especially because we had begun constructing the map based on the territory of the former Yugoslavia and at the time the map's structure was not immediately clear to us. The only way we might have corrected this later would have been to replace the inconsistency with some other arbitrary inclination. It should also be noted that in the case of the countries that developed from ex-Yugoslavia there is a certain amount of overlapping – both in the texts by the selectors and in some cases also in the selection of the artists. This is obviously due to the history that was shared until fairly recently. Still, it has to be stressed that also at that time several local art historical narratives existed that in most cases stayed within particular republic's borders. Only newer art practices and forms (mainly conceptual art practices) in some cases surpassed those borders, especially through artists that operated in different cities/countries.
- 4 Viktor Misiano's approach, however, was an exception. He decided to choose ten other contributors, each of whom selected one important artist or event.
- 5 East Art Map II was realised in collaboration with relations.
- 6 East Art Map Online www.eastartmap.org leads visitors through the past sixty years in the history of the visual arts in Eastern Europe. East Art Map Online is open to new contributions from the public. Developed by Renderspace-Pristop Interactive (Matevž Klanjšek, Davor Bauk), edited by Inke Arns and co-ordinated by Nataša Petrešin, the website is also part of e-flux projects www.e-flux.com
- 7 The East Art Map University Network is intended to create a platform for the discussion of art and cultural productions that converge around the axis of Eastern and Western art realities in Europe. Eight university partners from various European cities have joined the project: Marina Gržinić (Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna, and the Institute of Philosophy of the Scientific and Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts); Günther Heeg and Veronika Darian (Institute of Theatre Studies, Leipzig); Beatrice von Bismarck (Academy of Visual Arts, Leipzig); Ekaterina Degot (Institute of Contemporary Art, Moscow); Grzegorz Dziamski (Academy of Fine Arts, Poznań); Michael Fehr and Karin Schad (Karl Ernst Osthaus-Museum, Hagen); Werner Fenz (University of Graz); and Miško Šuvaković (University of Fine Arts, Belgrade). The Symposium 'Mind the Map! History Is Not Given', organised by Marina Gržinić, Günther Heeg and Veronika Darian, took place in October 2005 in Leipzig. Contributors on the university network were primarily postgraduate students interested in different histories, art productions, cultural processes, social entities and the politics of representation: Bojana Cvejić (University of Arts – Faculty of Music, Belgrade); Dr. Veronika Darian (University of Leipzig – Institute of Theatre Studies, Leipzig); Antje Dietze (University of Leipzig – Institute of Theatre Studies, Leipzig); Roman Grabner (Karl-Franzens-University – Institute of Art History, Graz); Alexander Koch (Academy of Visual Arts, Leipzig); Maxim Krekotnev (Institute of Contemporary Art, Moscow); Ralo Mayer and Philipp Haupt (Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna/University of Applied Arts, Vienna); Mirjana Peitler (Karl-Franzens-University – Institute of Art History, Graz); Marko Stamenković (University of Arts – Interdisciplinary Postgraduate Studies, Belgrade); Šefik Šeki Tatlić (Faculty of Political Science, Department of Journalism, Sarajevo); Michael Wehren (University of Leipzig – Institute of Theatre Studies, Leipzig); Ewa Wójtowicz, (Academy of Fine Arts, Poznań); Anya Zaytseva (Institute of Contemporary Art Moscow); Jacek Zydorowicz (Adam Mickiewicz University – Institute of Cultural Studies, Poznań); Karoline Kaluza (University Bonn, Institute of Art History). The symposium is to be followed by a book (scheduled for March 2006), which will present the theoretical and artistic positions of the scholars, professors and artists who contributed to the symposium.
- 8 East Art Museum: An Exhibition of the East Art Map – A (Re)Construction of the History of Contemporary Art in Eastern Europe took place at the Karl Ernst Osthaus-Museum in Hagen, Germany, from 10 September to 13 November 2005. Curated by Michael Fehr and IRWIN (Miran Mohar, Andrej Savski, Borut Vogelnic), it was designed as a proposal for establishing a Museum of Eastern European Art that would collect seminal works of art from Eastern Europe created since World War II. The exhibition East Art Museum presented a selection of artworks documented in East Art Map.

East Art Map



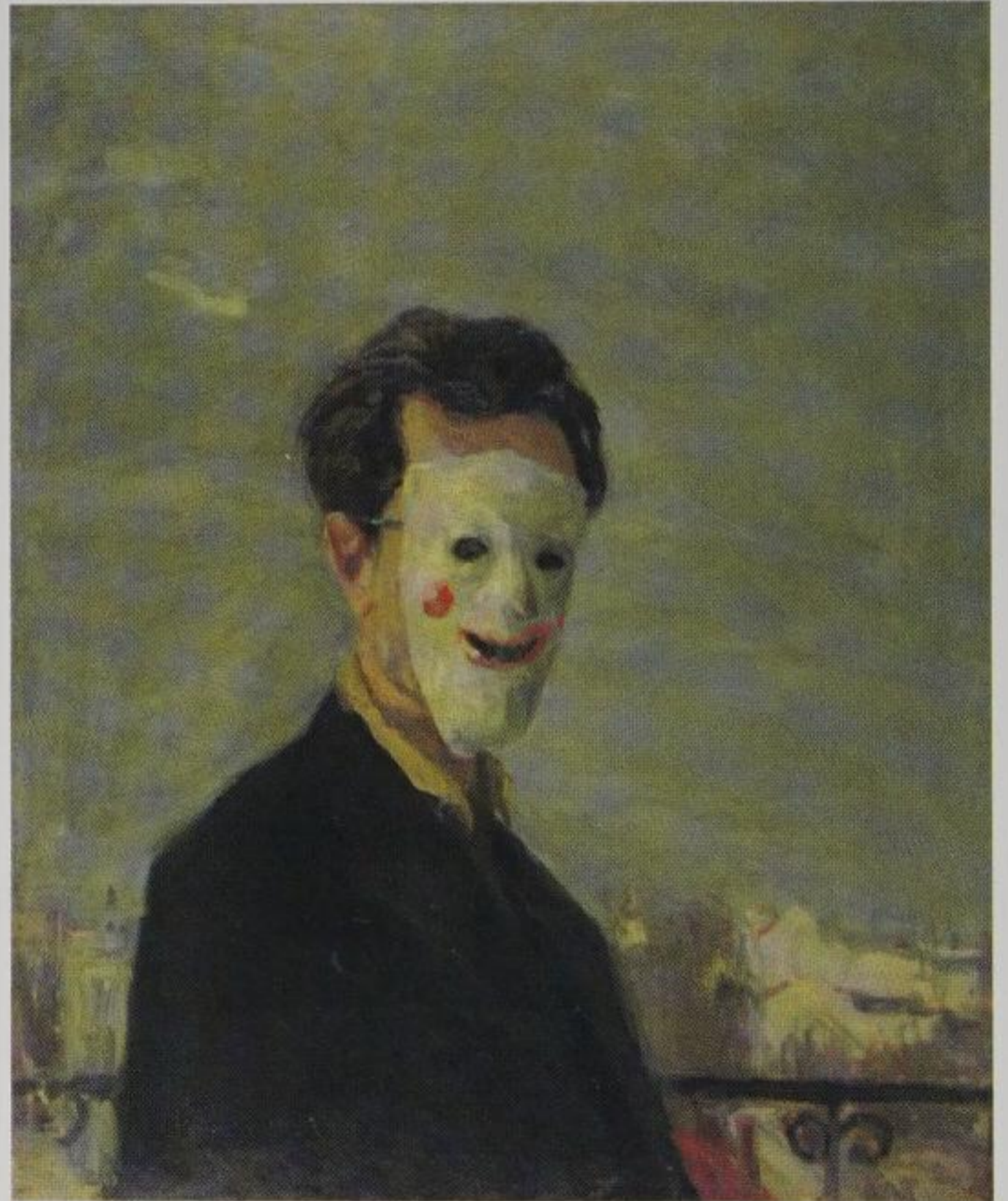
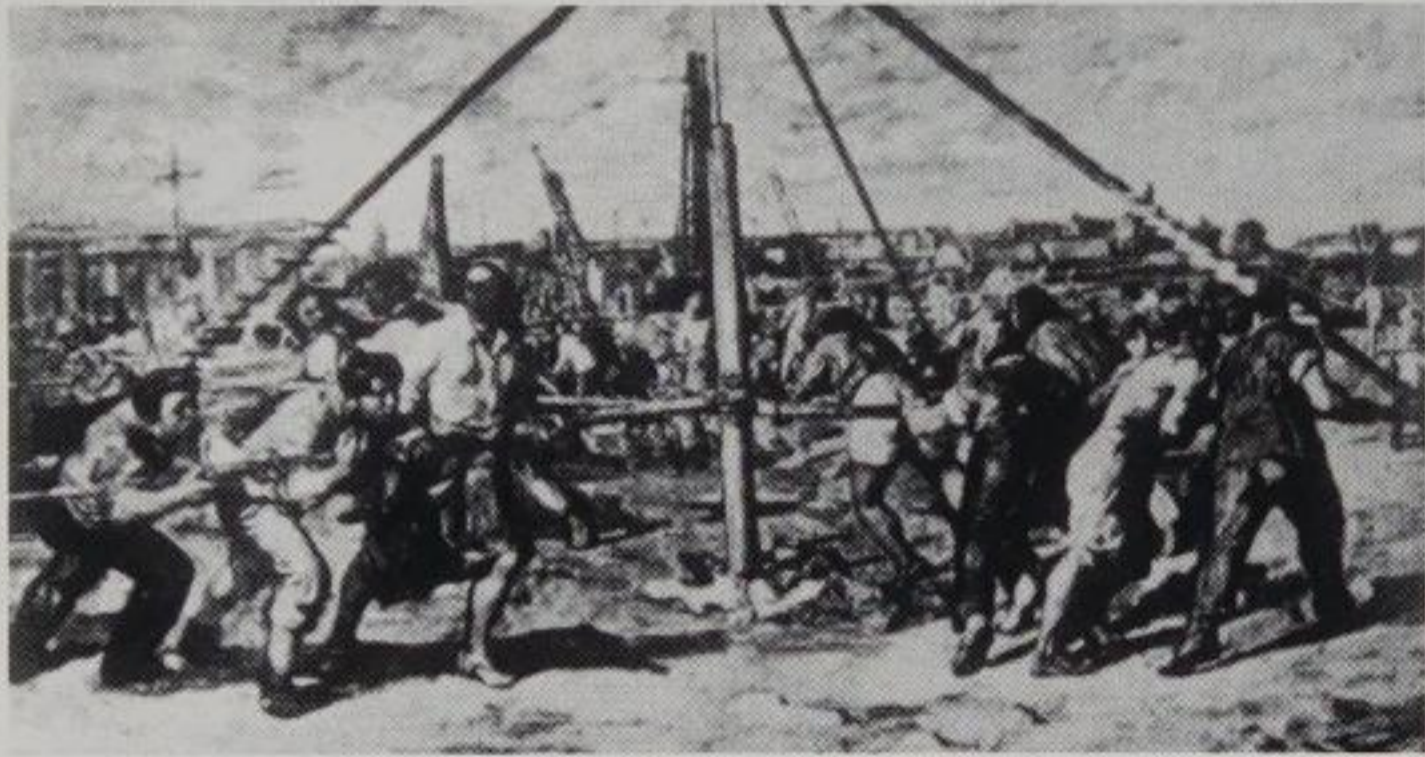
Part I

Selected Artworks and Events



1. Oto Bihalji Merin
(1904, Belgrade–1993)
*Group Portrait with
Oto Bihalji Merin*
photograph, circa 1920

2. Andrija Maurović
(1901, Boka Kotorska–
1981, Zagreb)
The Old Tomcat, detail of
the comic, started 1937



Clockwise from top:

3. Juozas Mikėnas
(1901–1964)
Mother with Child
terracotta, 20 × 38 × 7.8 cm,
1940

4. Mića Popović
(1923, Loznica–1996)
Self-Portrait with Mask
oil on canvas, 91 × 76 cm, 1947,
Museum of Contemporary
Art, Belgrade

5. Boža Ilić
(1919, Toplički Žitni
Potok–1993)
*Driving a Borehole in the
Terrain of New Belgrade*
oil on canvas, 240 × 440 cm,
1948, National Museum,
Belgrade



— stroj — osvěta — příroda — oprostění —

nové pojetí pokroku — obytná krajina budoucnosti:

*práci samočinných strojů k volnému času, ke kultuře hmotné i duševní, k lidskému zdo-
konalení, ozdravení, uklidnění, zvnitřnění a oprostění v osvobozené, zachráněné, obno-
vené a nově vytvářené přírodě renaturalisovaných krajin.* (1944.)



6. Ladislav Žák
(1900, Mladá Boleslav –
1973, Prague)
*Avant-garde Ideogram of the
Residential Landscape of the
Future* from the book entitled
*Habitable Landscape of the
Future*, Prague 1947, p. 136

7. Josip Seissel/Jo Klek
(1904, Krapina – 1987)
Untitled
event unknown, assumed
happening, photograph,
Brela, 1949

8. Alexander Arefiev
(1931–1978) and his circle:
Vladimir Shagin, Sholom
Schwarz, Valentin Gromov,
Richard Vasmi and others,
group photograph, circa 1950

... This age and this freedom will not be fought out on the basis of humanism. You will not rid yourself of the loosely summoned ghosts of the 19th century by exorcising them, but only through their materialisation. Today's poetry cannot only be positive, merely a morsel of beauty or love, an Edwardian idyll and automatic drowsiness. The only poetry is that of negation – not a negation of stating but of construing: a negation of justice, life, fortune, love, obligation and value, which, being a negation of a negation of the 19th century is a newly opened Hegelian statement. We have arrived at the situation where we can no longer come to terms with life on a contemporary basis. We will stand outside the law in that we are uncompromisingly establishing the position of the world we want in the year 2000, and therefore we will rock the boat we are all sailing on. The passivity of existentialism resulting in a helpless acceptance of a world impossible to live in is just as abhorrent as the Soviet mythology of work obligations, which is to be hypnotic to the “over-waken” human consciousness. The catastrophe of this consciousness is the power that severs all bonds of morals, obligations and order of today's society. And to bring about this catastrophe is at least partly the function of literature and art in the age of fascism...

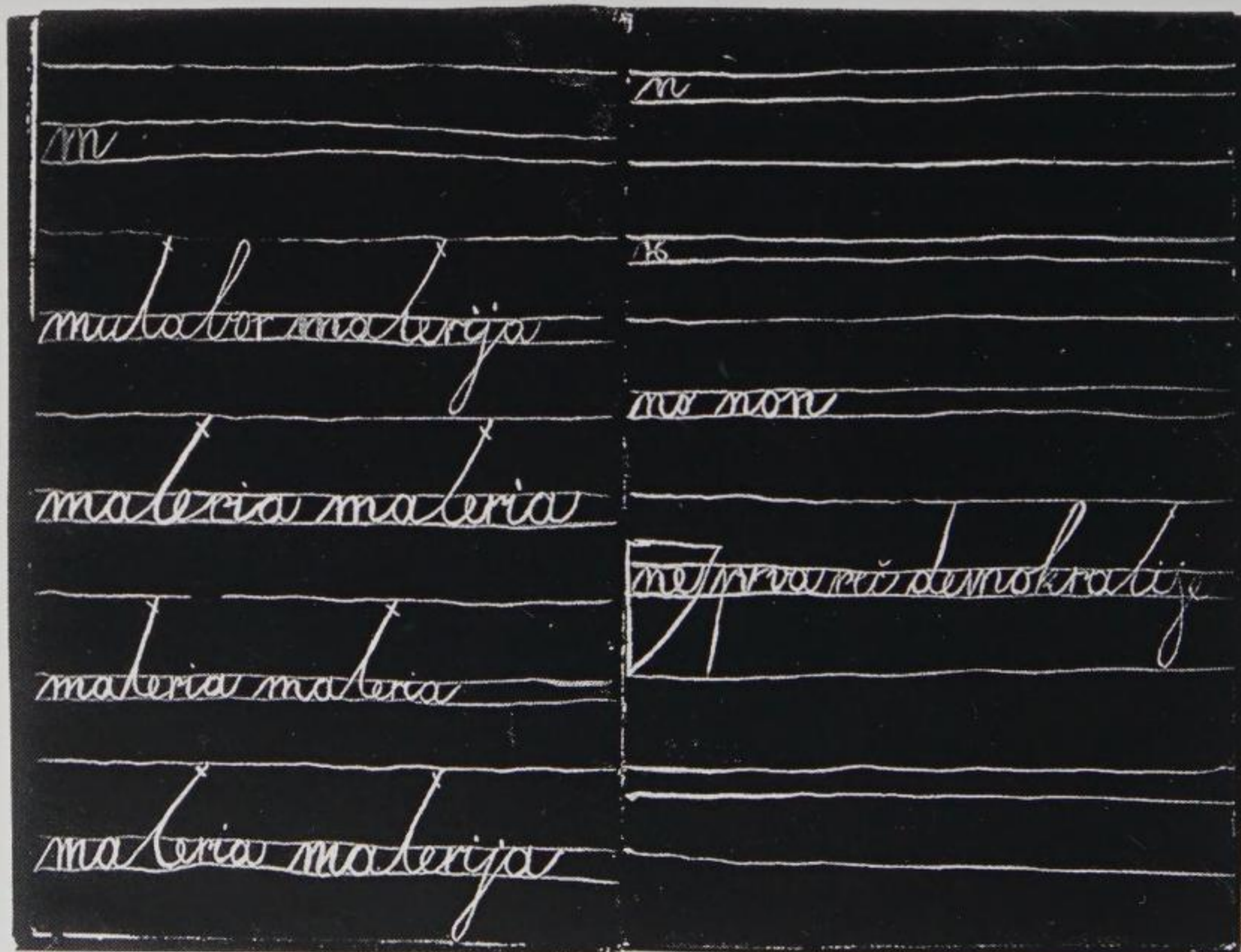


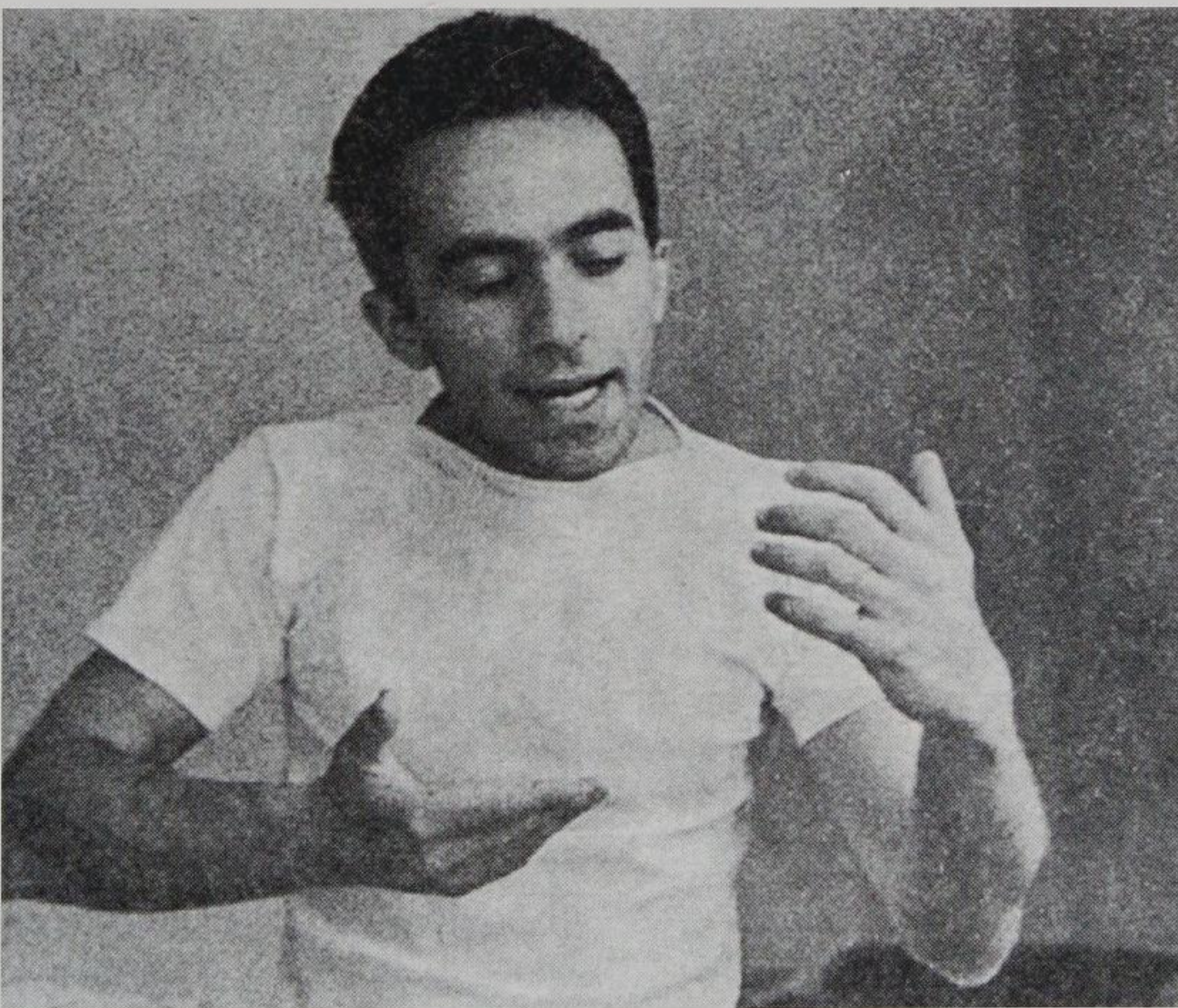
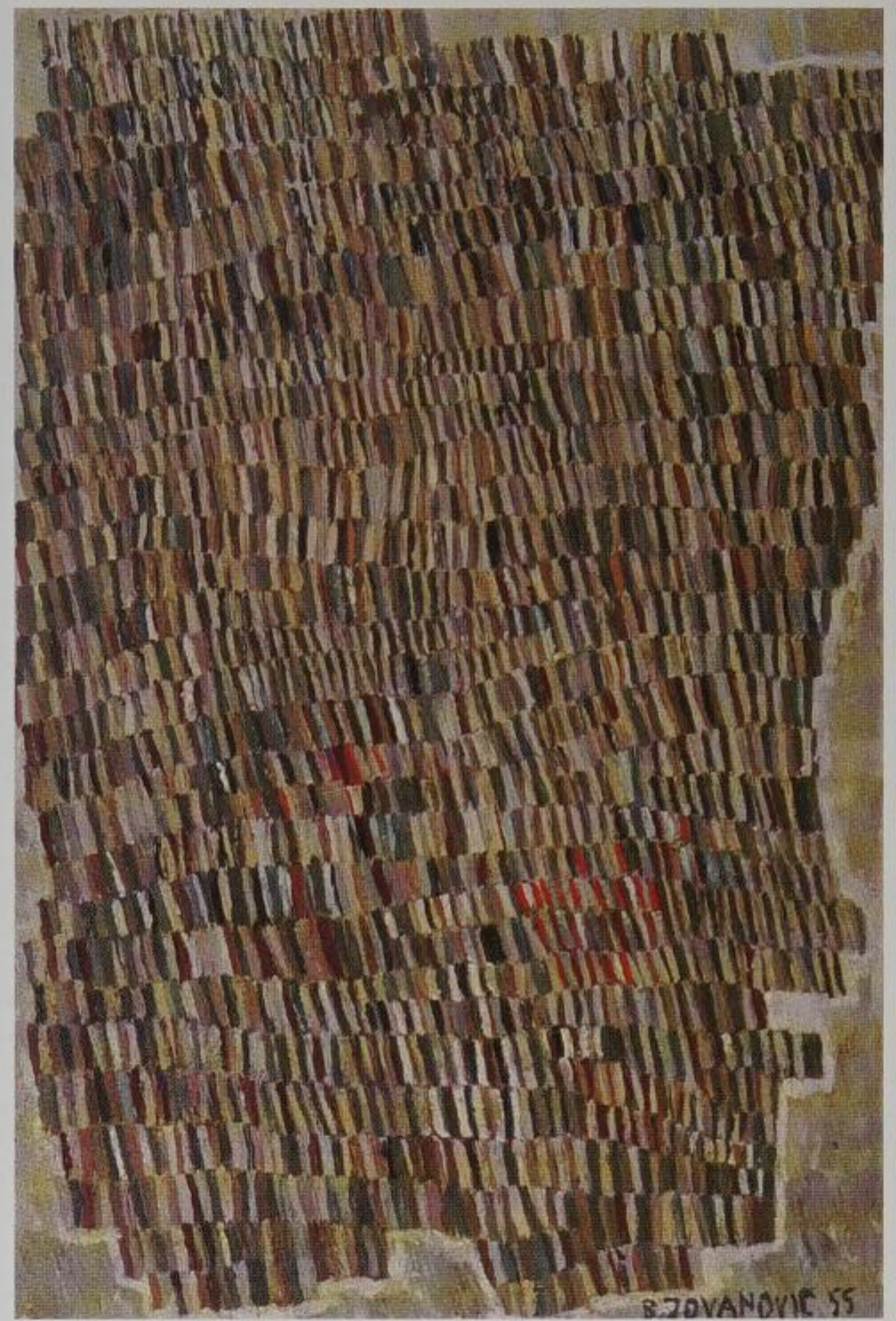
Clockwise from top left:

9. Egon Bondy
(1930, Prague)
2000
a novel
1949–1950

10. Petar Lubarda
(1907, Ljubotin–1974)
Guslar (The Fiddler)
oil on canvas, 163 × 147.5 cm,
1952

11. Dimitrije Bašičević-
Mangelos
(1921, Šid–1987, Zagreb)
Les Paysages De Tabula
artist's book, tempera on
paper, 19.3 × 12.8 cm, 1953



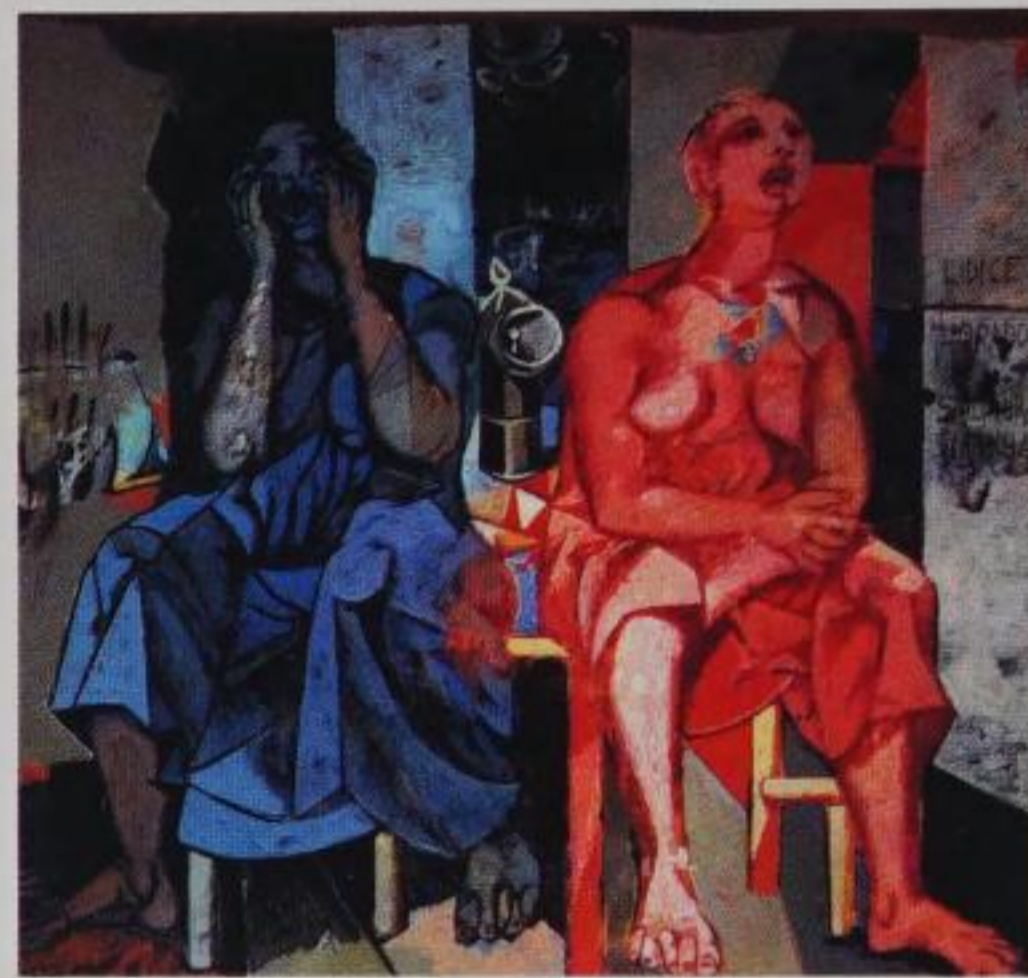


Clockwise from top left:

12. **Stane Kregar**
 (1905–1973, Ljubljana)
The Spring Wind
 oil on canvas, 118 × 89 cm, 1954
 Museum of Modern Art
 Ljubljana

13. **Bogoljub Jovanović**
K55
 oil on canvas, 194.5 × 113 cm,
 detail, 1955

14. **Vladan Radovanović**
 (1932, Belgrade)
*Fijo-tan-bal Verbal-
 Gestural Work*
 action, photograph, 1957



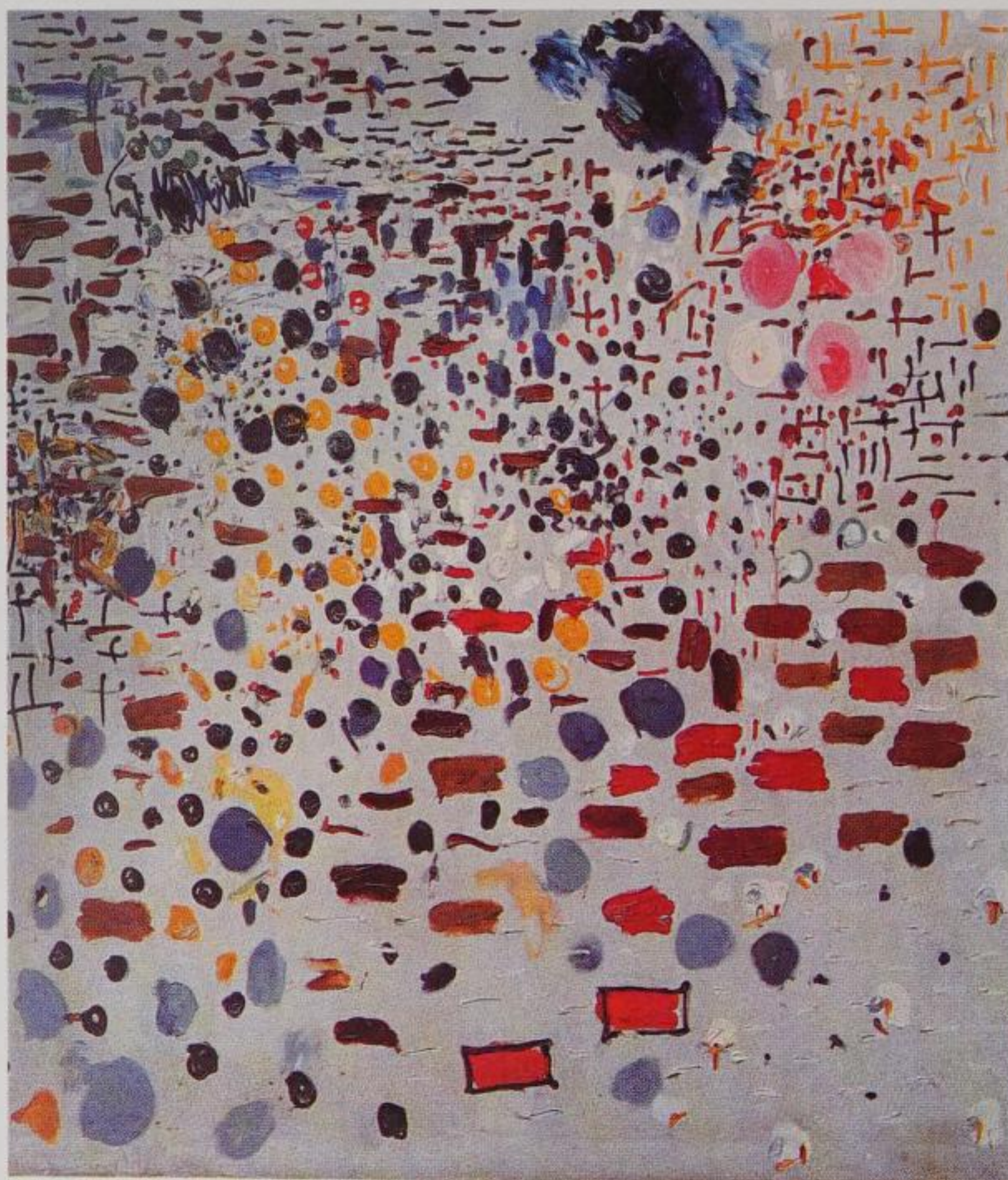
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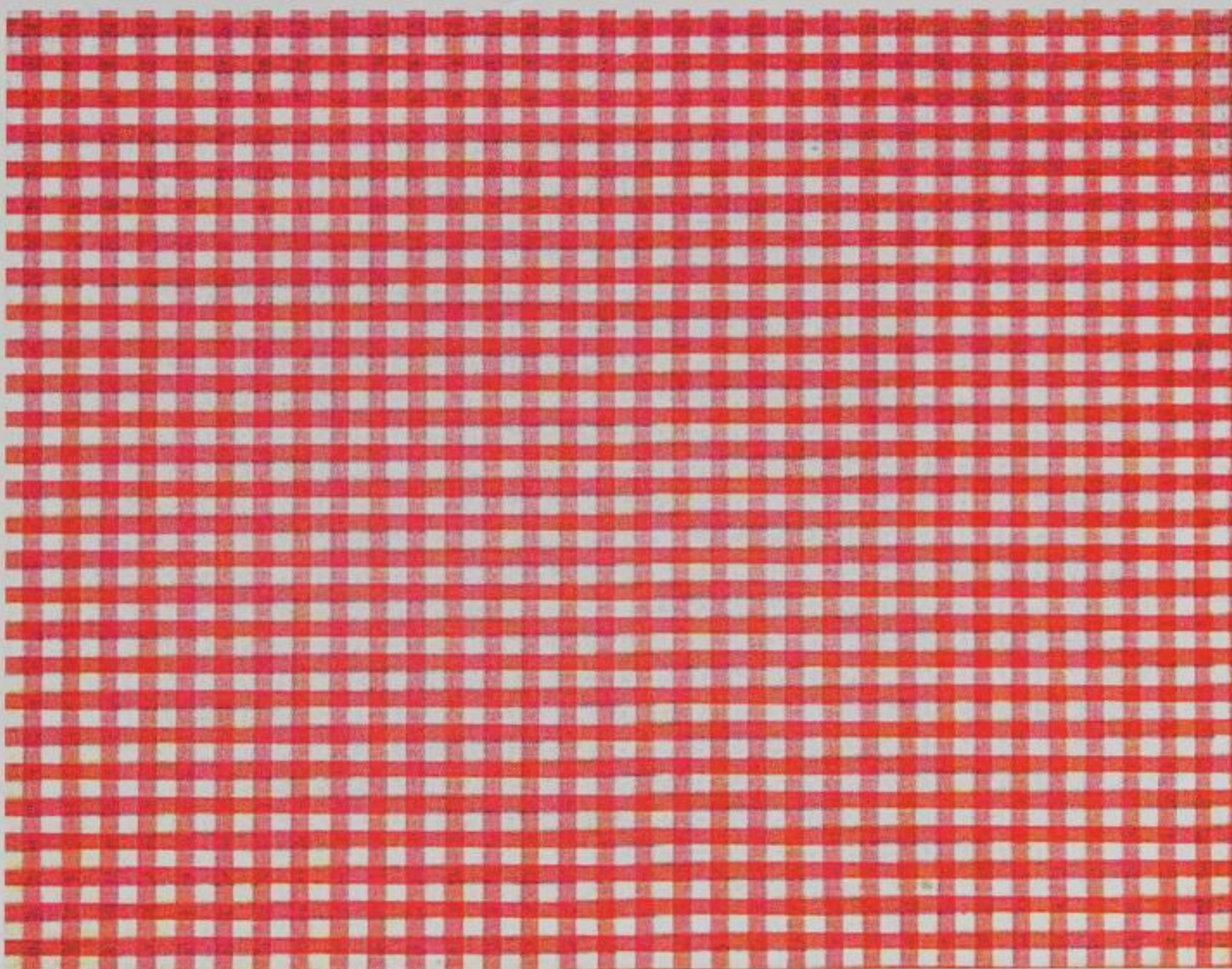
15. Leonid Šejka
(1932, Belgrade–1970)
Proclamations
action, photograph, 1958

16. Tadeusz Kantor
(1915, Wielopole–1990)
Amarapura
oil on canvas, 102.5 × 122 cm,
1957, National Museum,
Poznań

17. Willi Sitte
(1921, Chrastava/Kratzau)
Calling Women
oil on canvas, 150 × 165 cm,
1957

18. Vladimir Slepian
(1930, Moscow)
Composition
oil on canvas,
110 × 100 cm, 1957

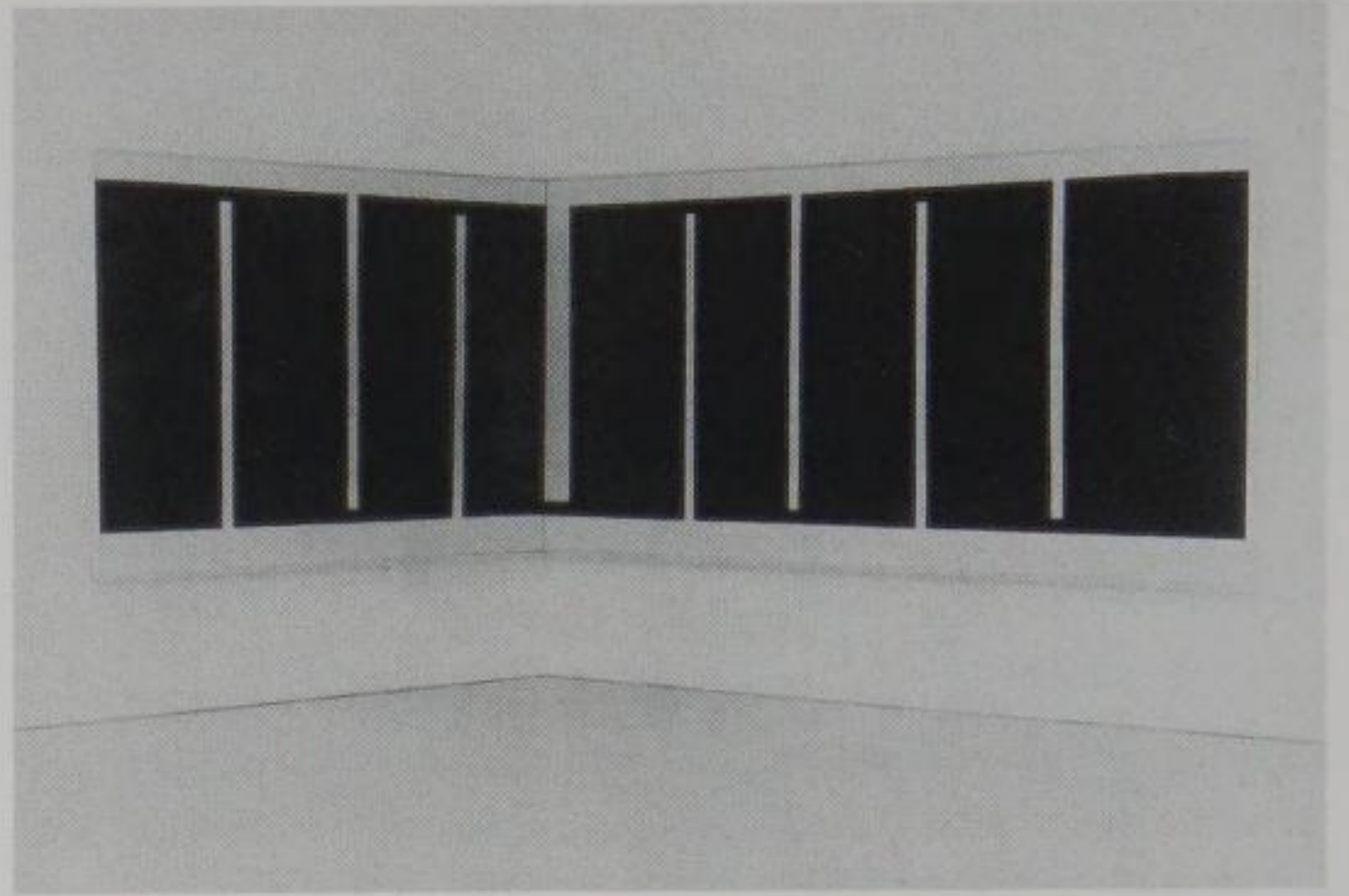




19. Olga Jevrić
(1922, Belgrade)
Complementary Form 1
iron sculpture, 13 × 7 × 5 cm,
1956

20. Zora Petrović
(1894, Dobrica–1962,
Belgrade)
Mature Women
oil on canvas, 189 × 130 cm,
1959, Museum of
Contemporary Art, Belgrade

21. Mikhail Chernyshev
(1945, Moscow)
Geometry 158 × 200
oil on canvas, 158 × 200 cm,
1962



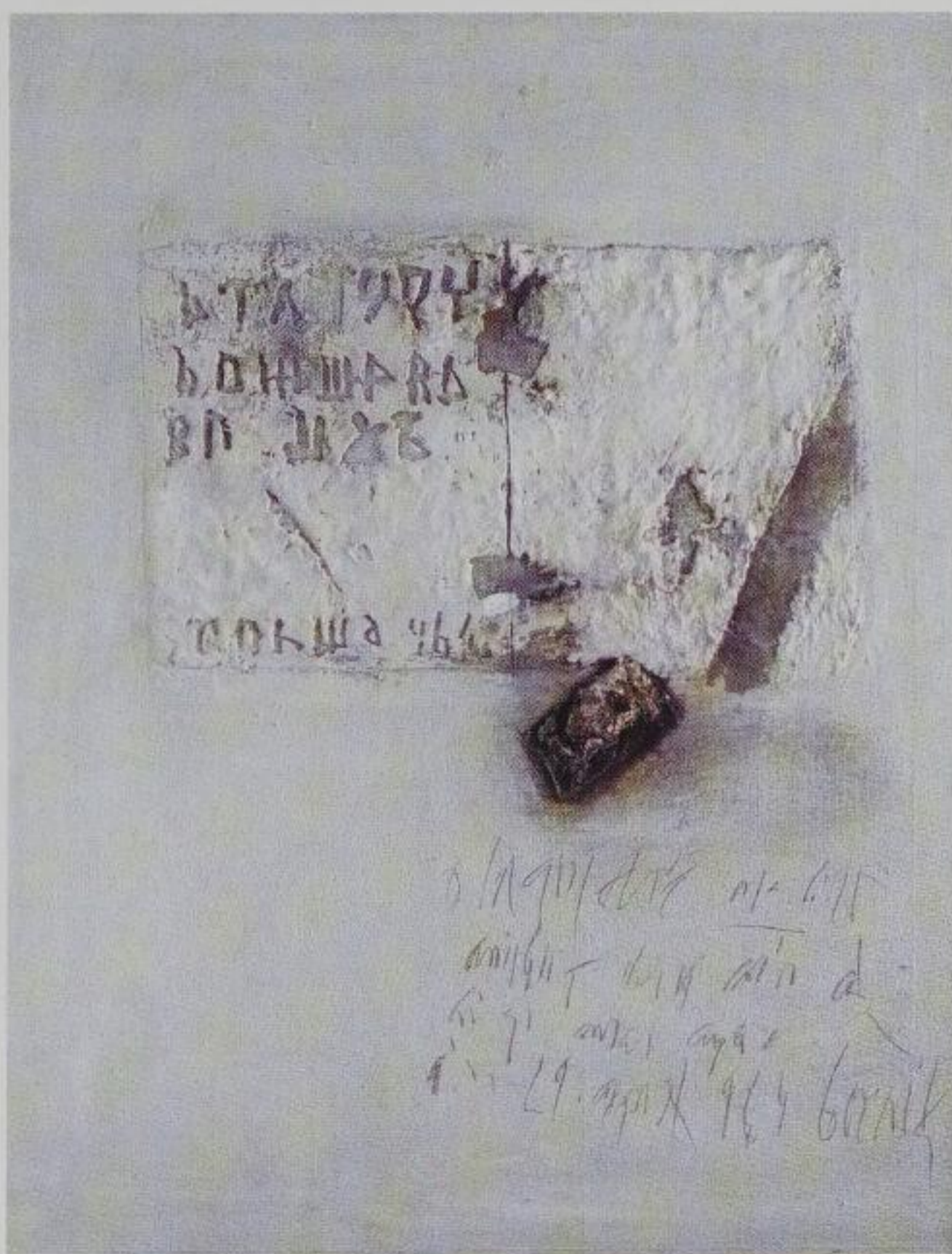
Clockwise from top left:

22. **Gorgona Anti-Review**
(1961–1966, Zagreb)
Josip Vaništa, Gorgona, N° 6
screenprint on paper,
21 × 19.4 cm, 1961

23. **Julije Knifer**
(1924, Osijek–2004, Paris)
Meander in a Corner
oil on canvas, 143 × 308 cm
and 143 × 199 cm, 1961

24. **Gabrijel Stupica** (1913,
Dražgoše–1990, Ljubljana)
Studio
tempera on canvas,
120 × 170 cm, 1962, Museum
of Modern Art Ljubljana

25. **Ivan Tabaković**
(1898, Arad–1977)
from *The Hidden Worlds Cycle*
photomontage, 280 × 255 mm,
1961



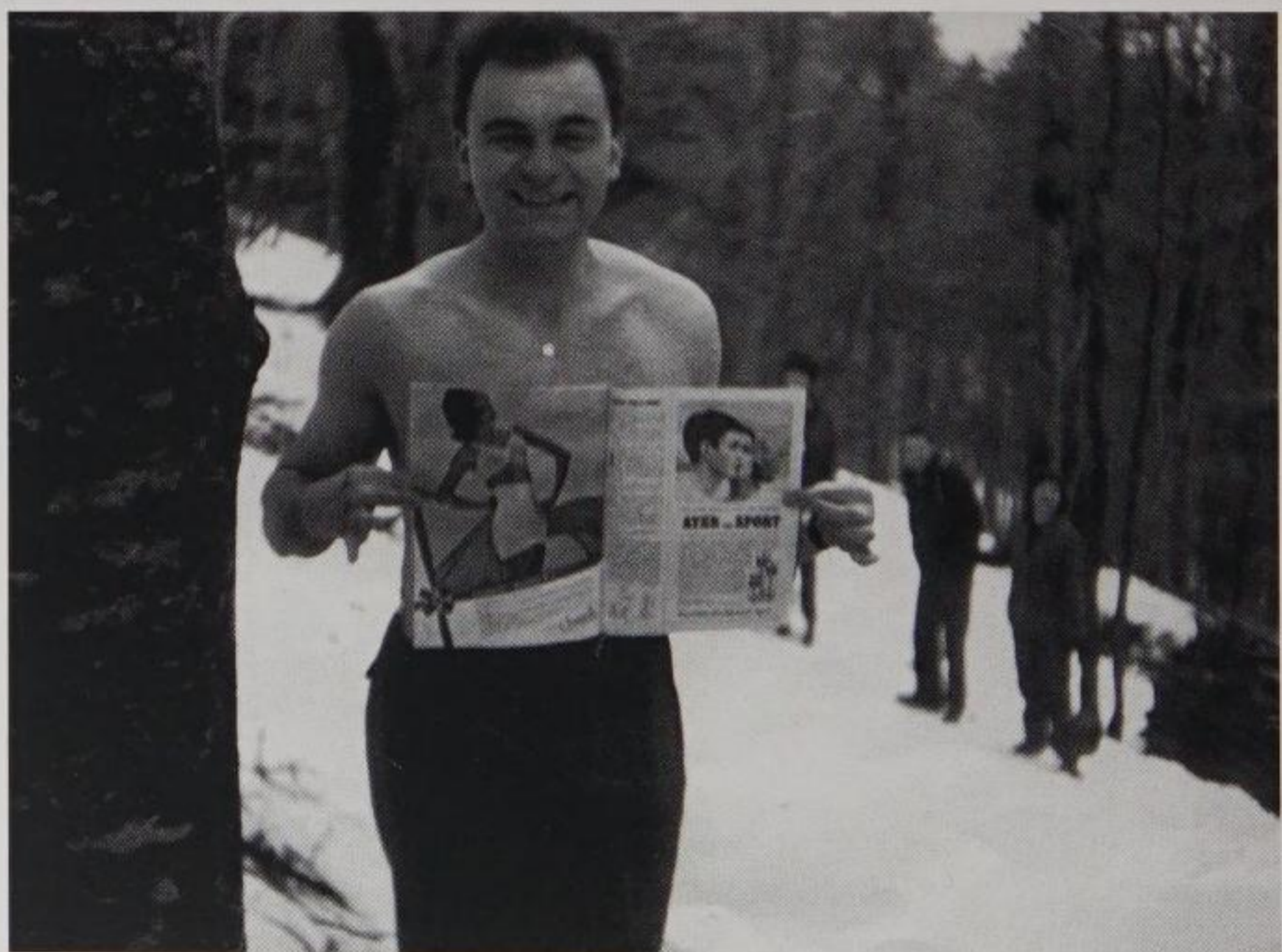
26. Ivan Kožarić
(1921, Petrinja)
Slicing off Sljeme
photomontage, 1960

27. Janez Bernik
(1933, Ljubljana)
White Notation
tempera on canvas,
140 × 110 cm, 1964, Museum
of Modern Art Ljubljana



28. Milan Knížák
 (1940, Pilsen)
*The Second Manifestation of
 Actual Art*
 with Vít Mach, Soňa Švecová
 and Jan Trtílek
 performance, 1965

29. Tomislav Gotovac
 (1937, Sombor)
Presenting the Elle Magazine
 performance, 1962
 photograph by Ivica Hripko



Opposite page:

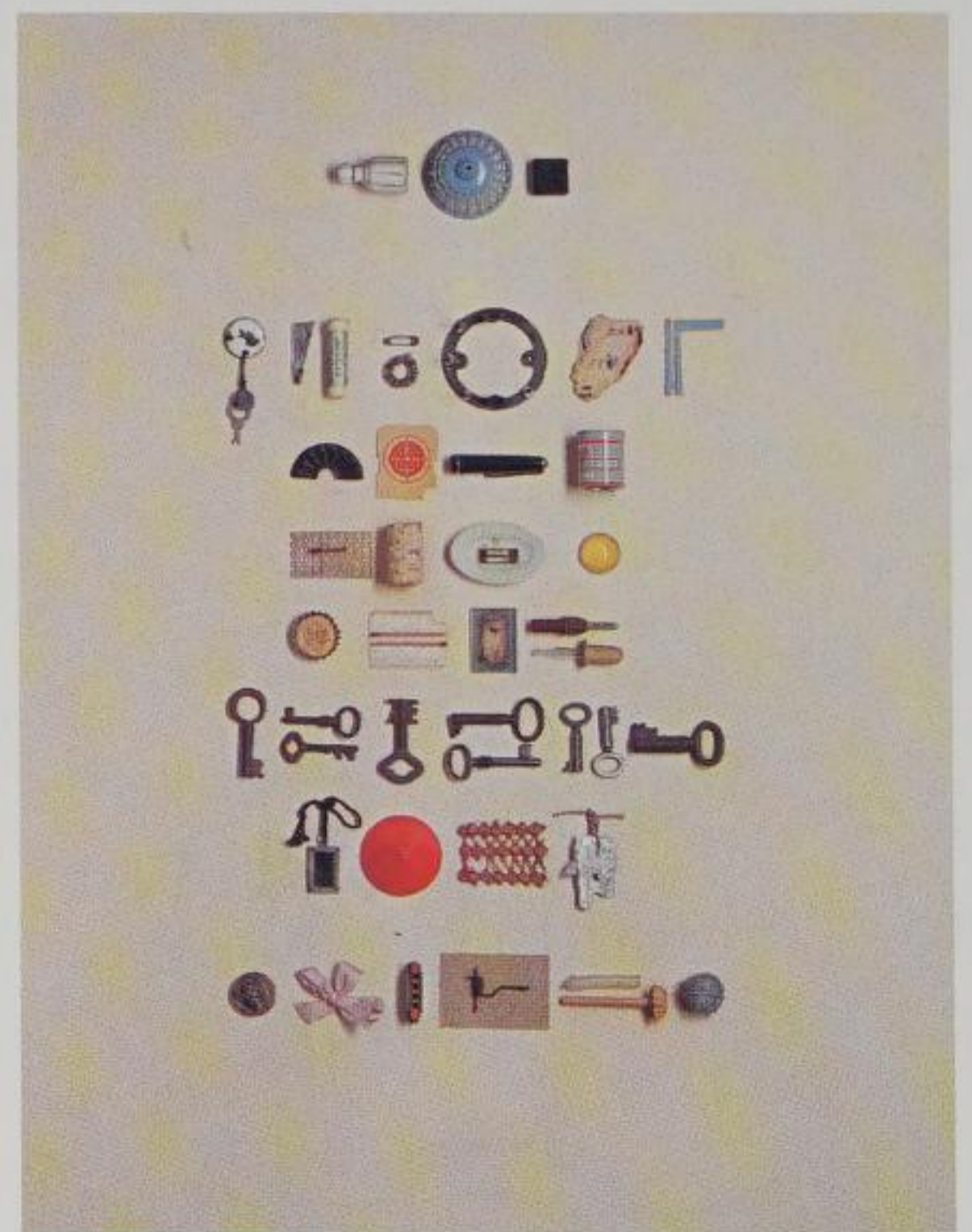
30. Christo (1935, Gabrovo),
 and Jeanne-Claude
 (1935, Casablanca)
Iron Curtain
 wall of oil barrels, 1962

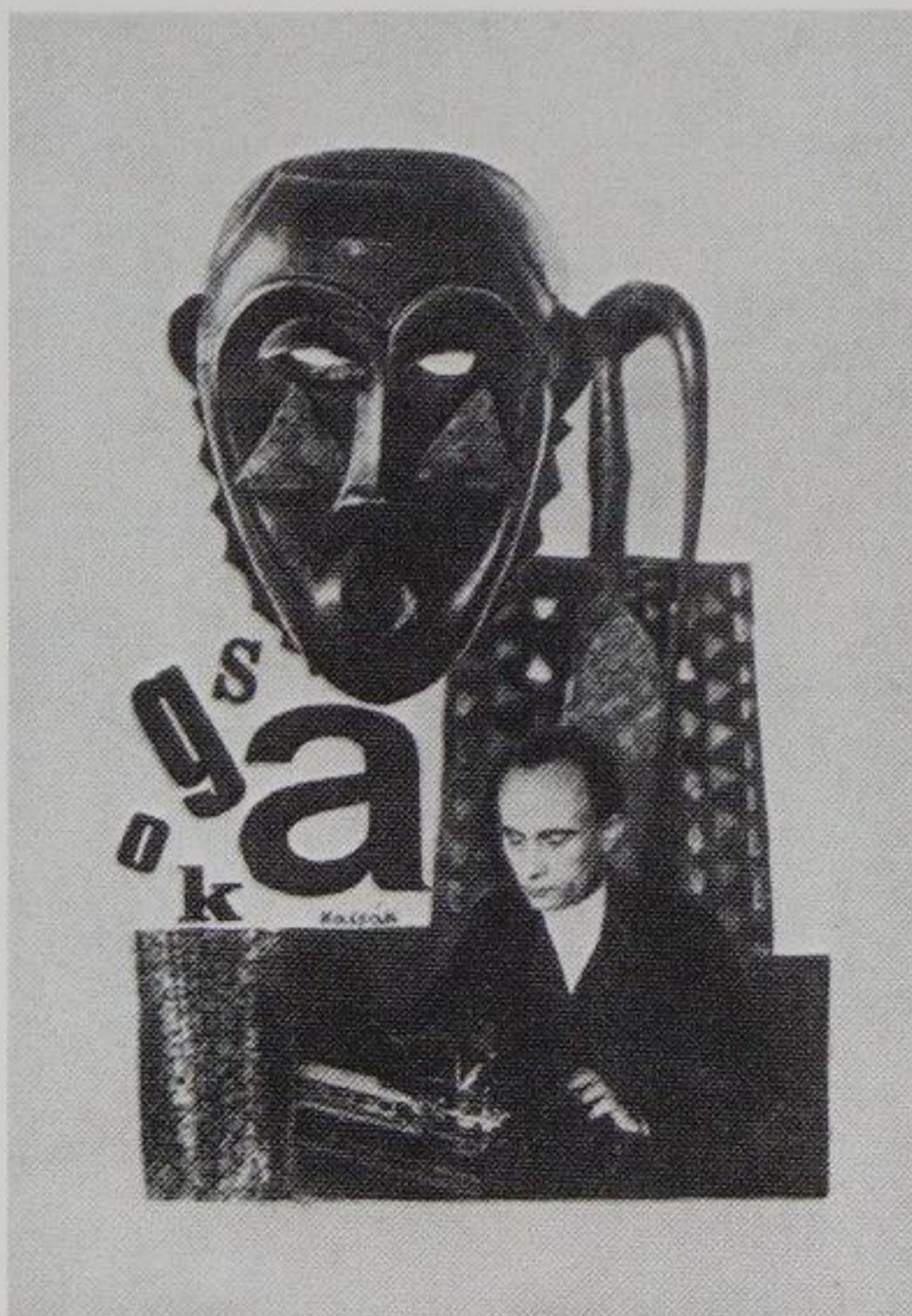
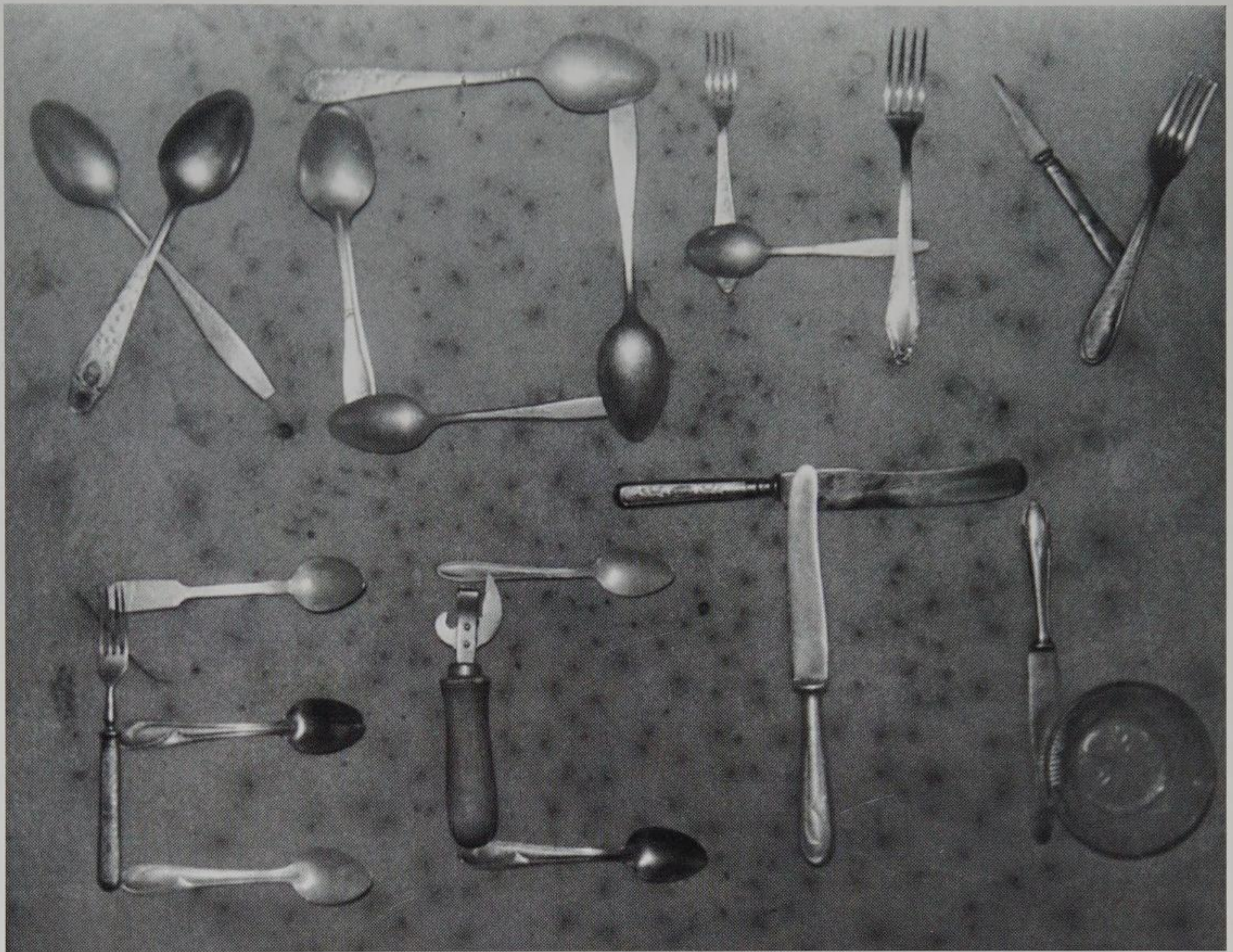




31. **Francisco Infante**
 (1943, Vasilievka)
 from the series *Eternal Spirals*
 watercolour, 440 × 490 cm,
 detail, 1963

32. **Jiří Kolář**
 (1914, Protivín–2002,
 Prague)
Black Sugar
 object-poem, assemblage on
 board, 80 × 60 cm, 1963



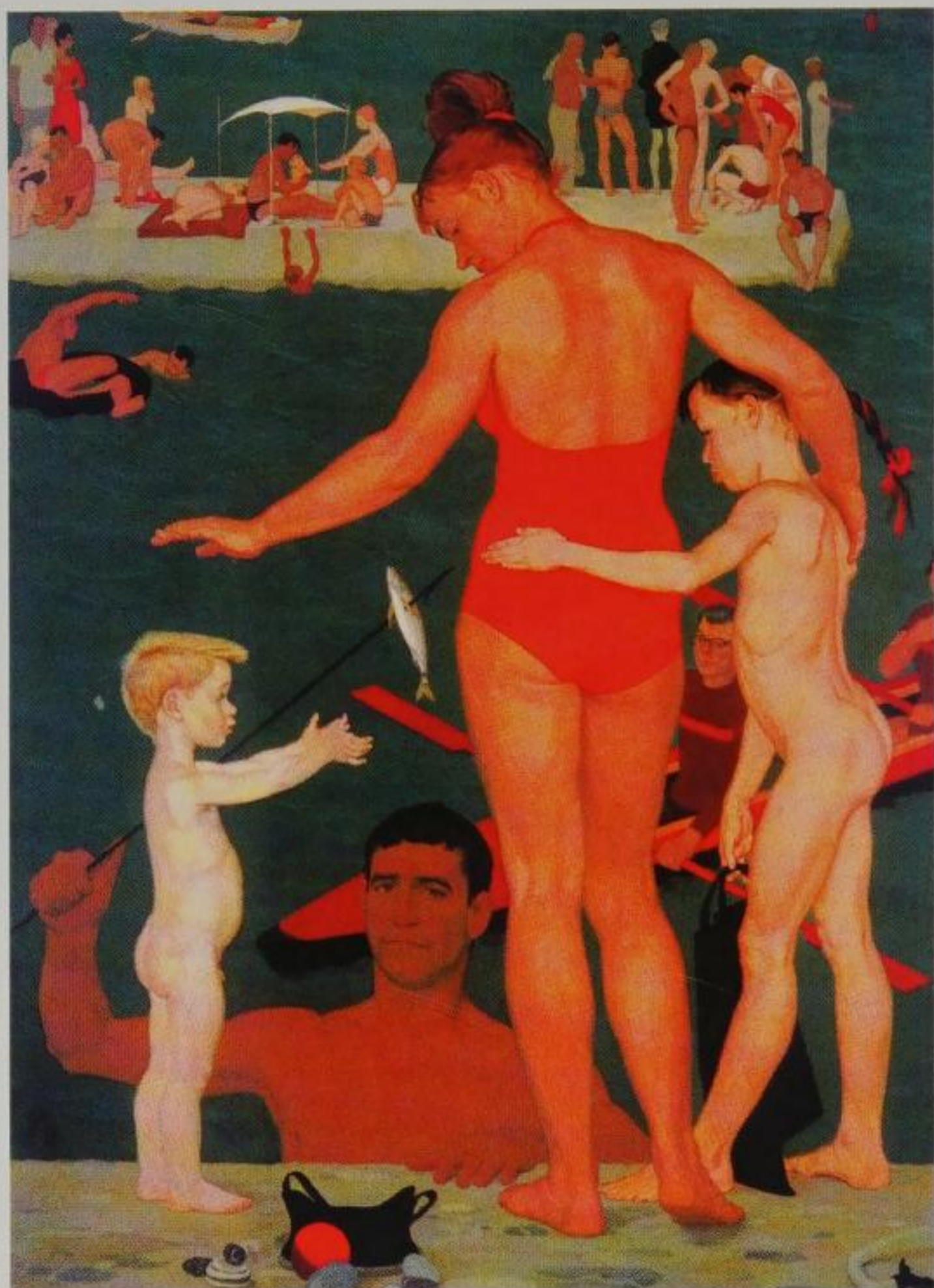


Clockwise from top:

33. Valery Cherkasov
(1948, Leningrad)
I Want to Eat
mixed media, spoons
on the table, 1964

34. Marij Pregelj
(1913, Kranj – 1967, Ljubljana)
Unknown Hero
oil on canvas, 149.5 × 179.5 cm,
1966, Museum of Modern Art
Ljubljana

35. Lajos Kassák (1887,
Érsekújvár – 1967, Budapest)
Self-Portrait Montage
collage on paper, 37 × 28.4 cm,
1964



36. Dmitry Zhilinsky (1927)
Family at the Sea
tempera on wooden board,
125 × 90 cm, 1964

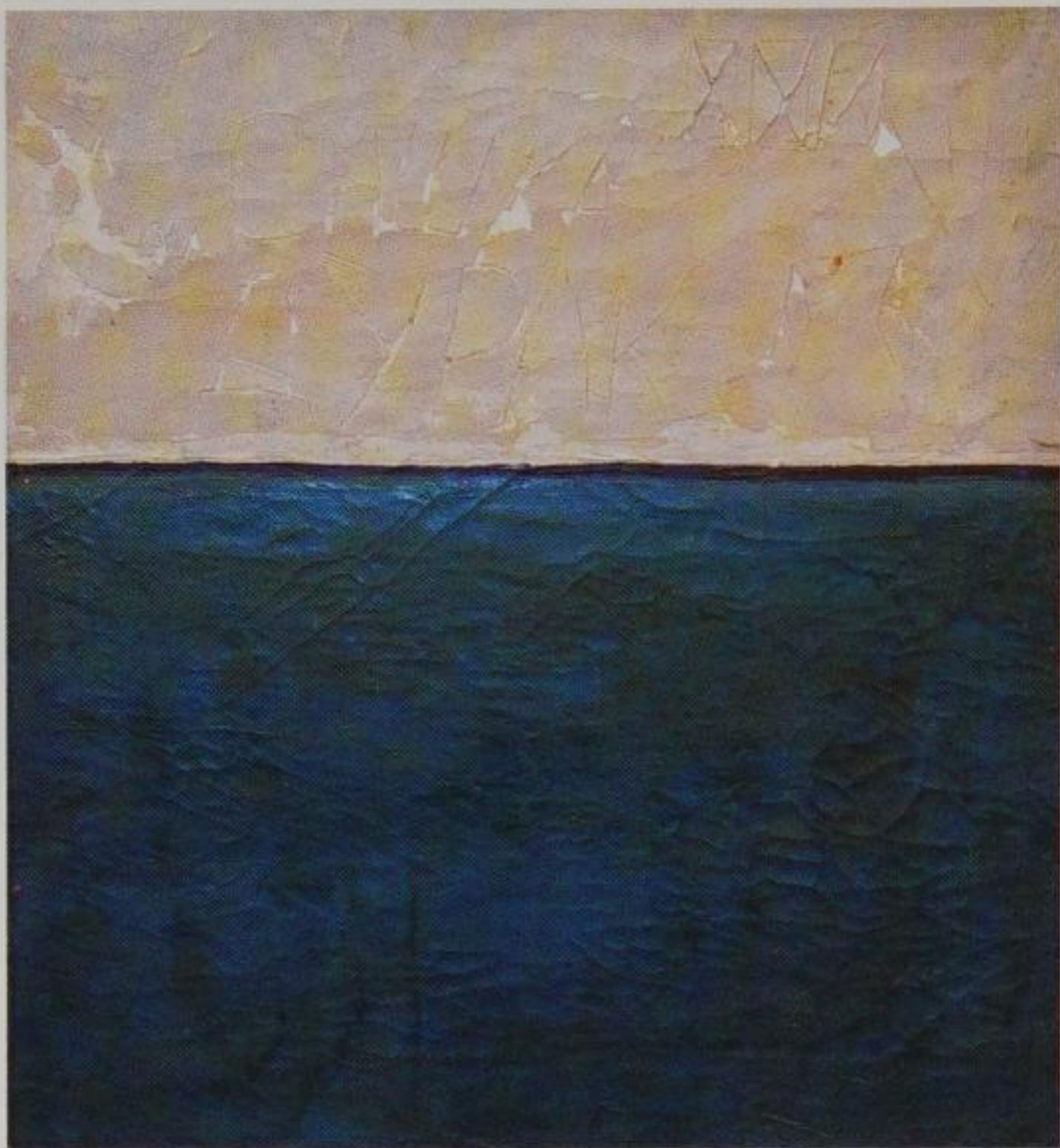
37. Vladas Vildžiūnas
(1932, Dabužiai)
Three Kings
boiled copper tin, H 500 cm,
1967–1968

38. The Gorgona Group
(1959–1966): Josip Vaništa
(1924, Karlovac), Julije Knifer
(1924, Osijek), Marijan
Jevšovar (1922, Zagreb–1998,
Zagreb), Đuro Seder (1927,
Zagreb), Radoslav Putar (1929,
Varaždin–1994, Zagreb),
Matko Meštrović (1933,
Korčula), Dimitrije Bašičević-
Mangelos (1921, Šid–1987,
Zagreb), Ivan Kožarić (1921,
Petrinja), Miljenko Horvat
(1935, Varaždin)
Adoration
collective action, photograph,
1966





39. Roman Opalka
(1931, Hocquincourt)
1965/1-∞, Detail: 1-35327
tempera on canvas,
196 × 135 cm, detail, 1965,
Museum Sztuki, Łódź



40. Evgeny Rukhin
(1943, Saratov–1976)
The Wall
wallpaint on canvas,
68 × 62 cm, 1962

41. Malle Leis
(1940, Viljandi)
Man on the Seashore
oil on canvas, 100 × 100 cm,
1968

43. Danish Jukniu
(1934, Shkodra)
Working for the Light
oil on canvas, 196 × 196 cm,
1969

42. George Apostu
(1934–1986, Paris)
Father and Son
wood, 210 × 55 × 45 cm,
1968



44. Stano Filko
(1937, Bratislava)
Cathedral of Humanism
environment,
400 × 500 × 300 cm,
1967–68

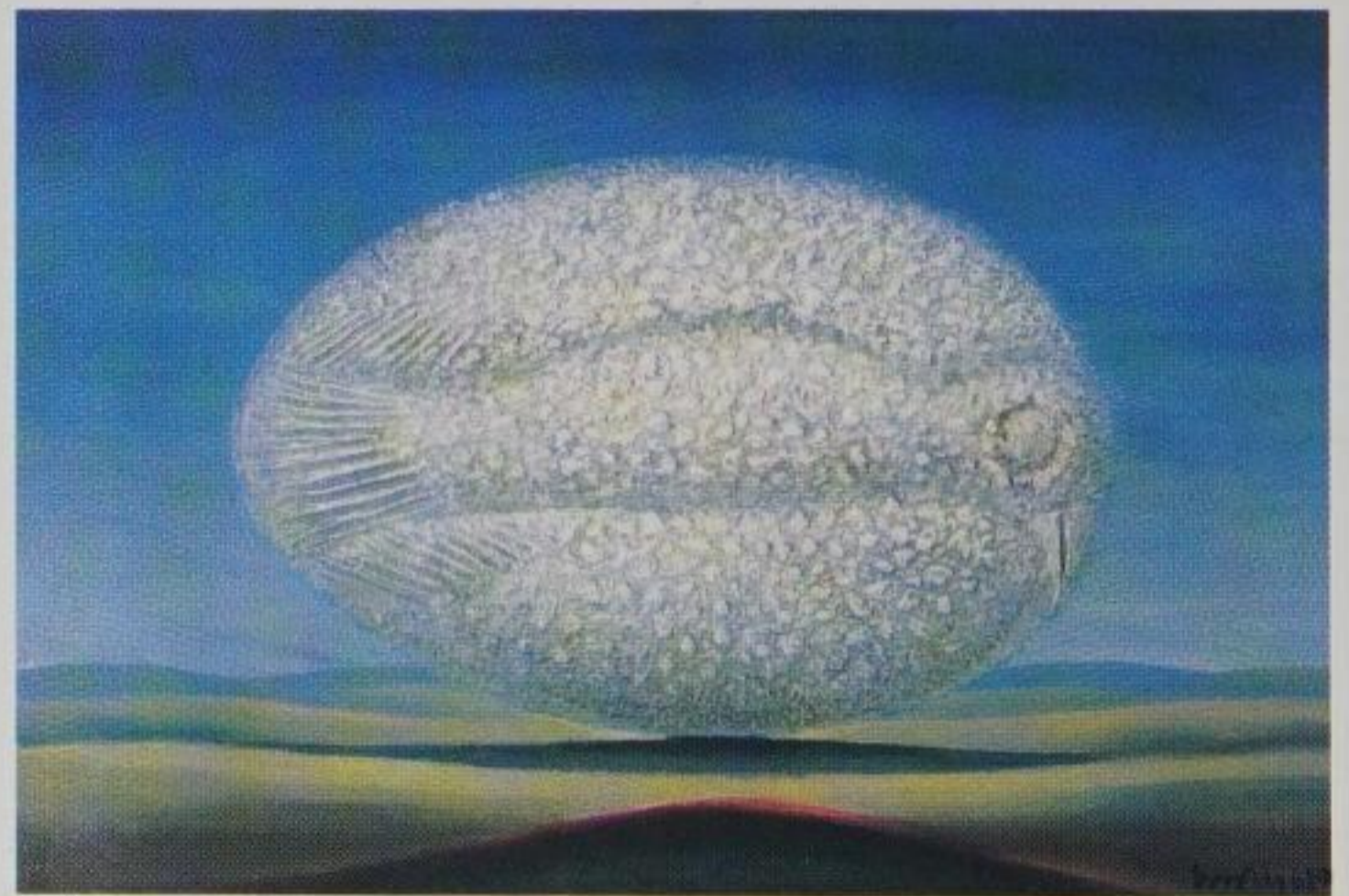


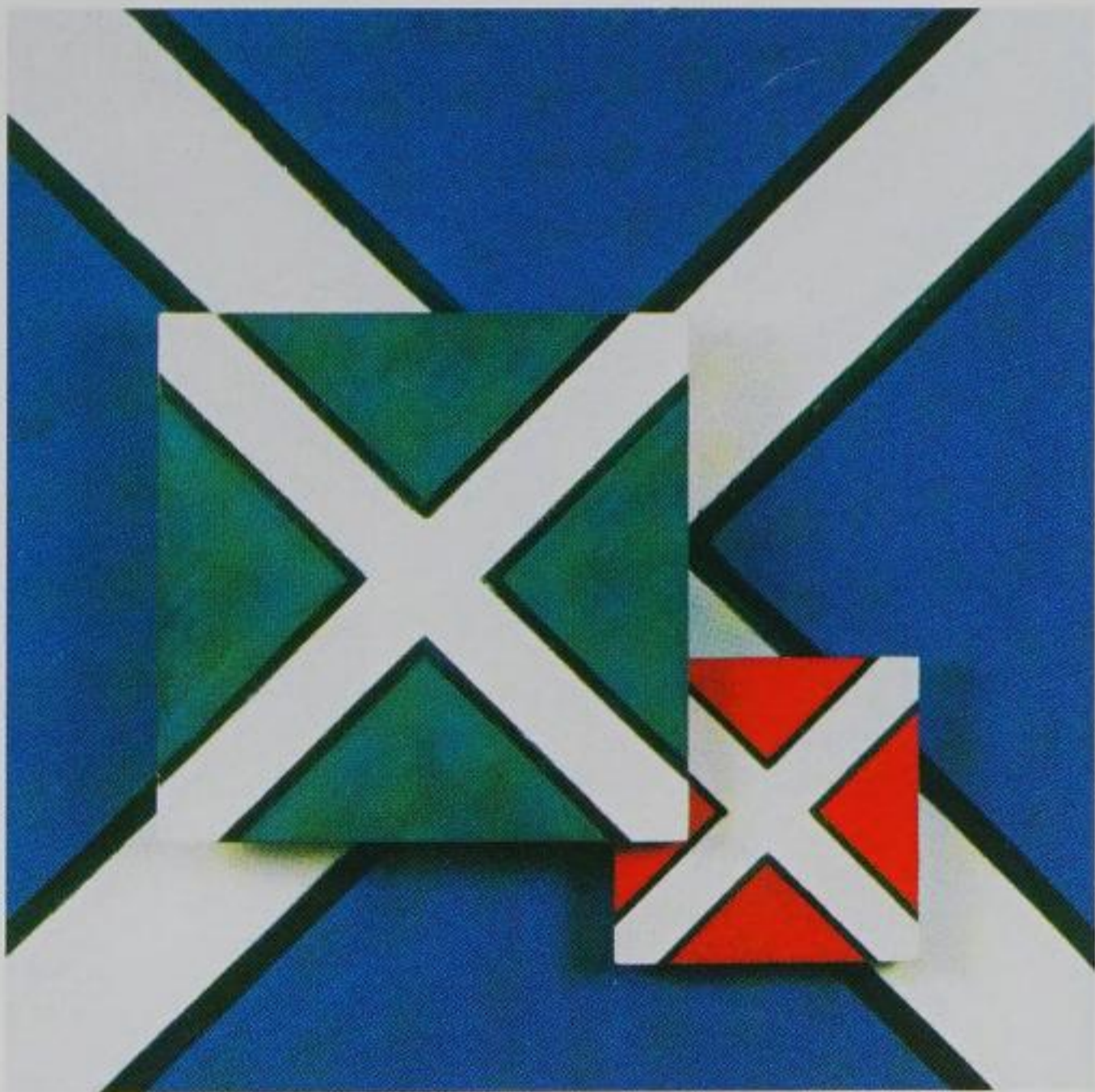
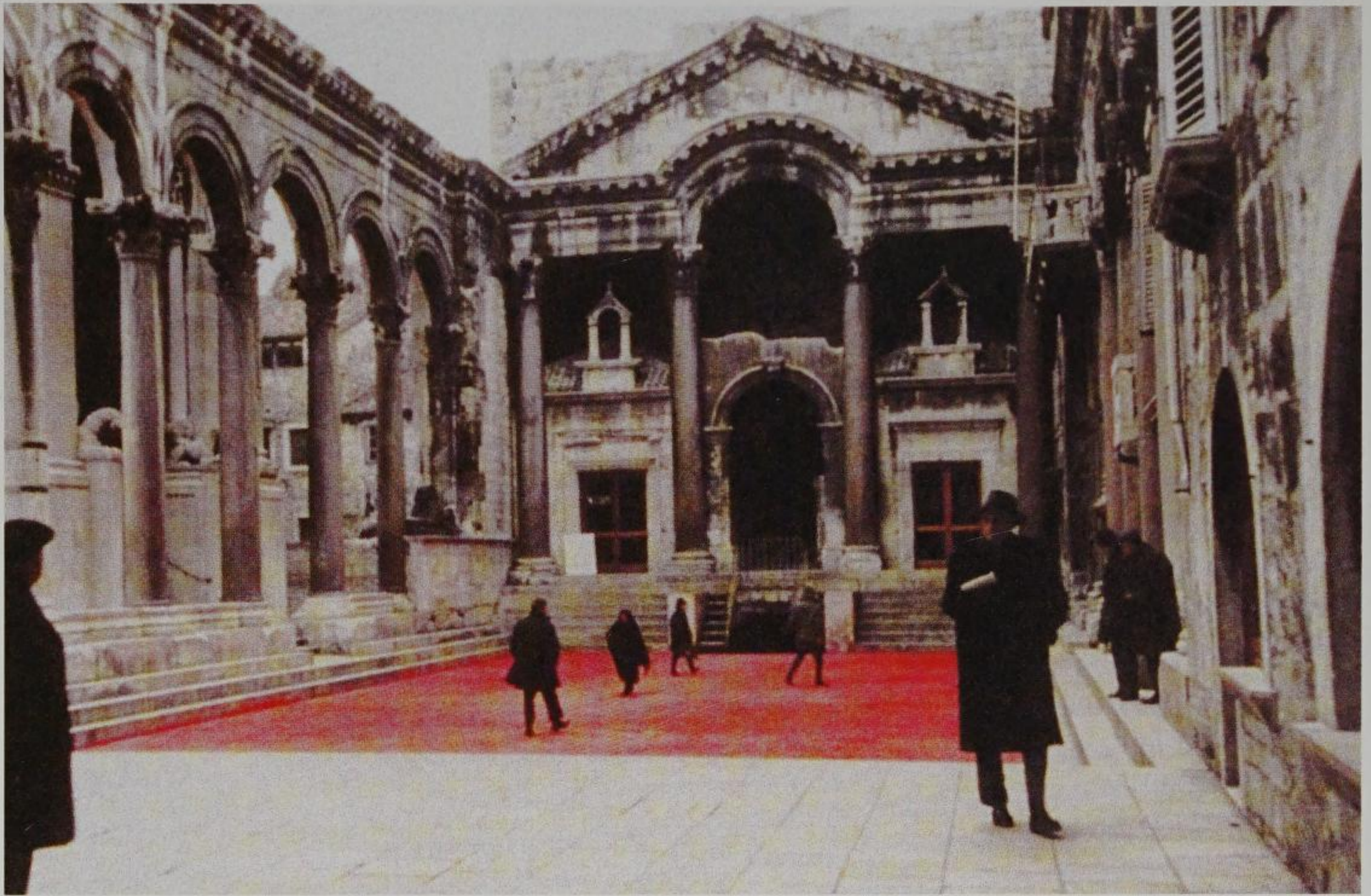
Clockwise from top left:

45. **Group OHO** (1966–1971):
Milenko Matanović (1947,
 Ljubljana), **David Nez**
 (1949, Massachusetts),
Marko Pogačnik (1944,
 Kranj), **Andraž Šalamun**
 (1947, Ljubljana), **Tomaž**
Šalamun (1941, Zagreb)
Mount Triglav
 happening in Zvezda park,
 Ljubljana, December 30, 1968

46. **Julius Koller**
 (1939, Piešťany)
Question Mark,
 from *The Anti-Picture Series*
 latex on unprimed canvas,
 95 × 89 cm, 1969

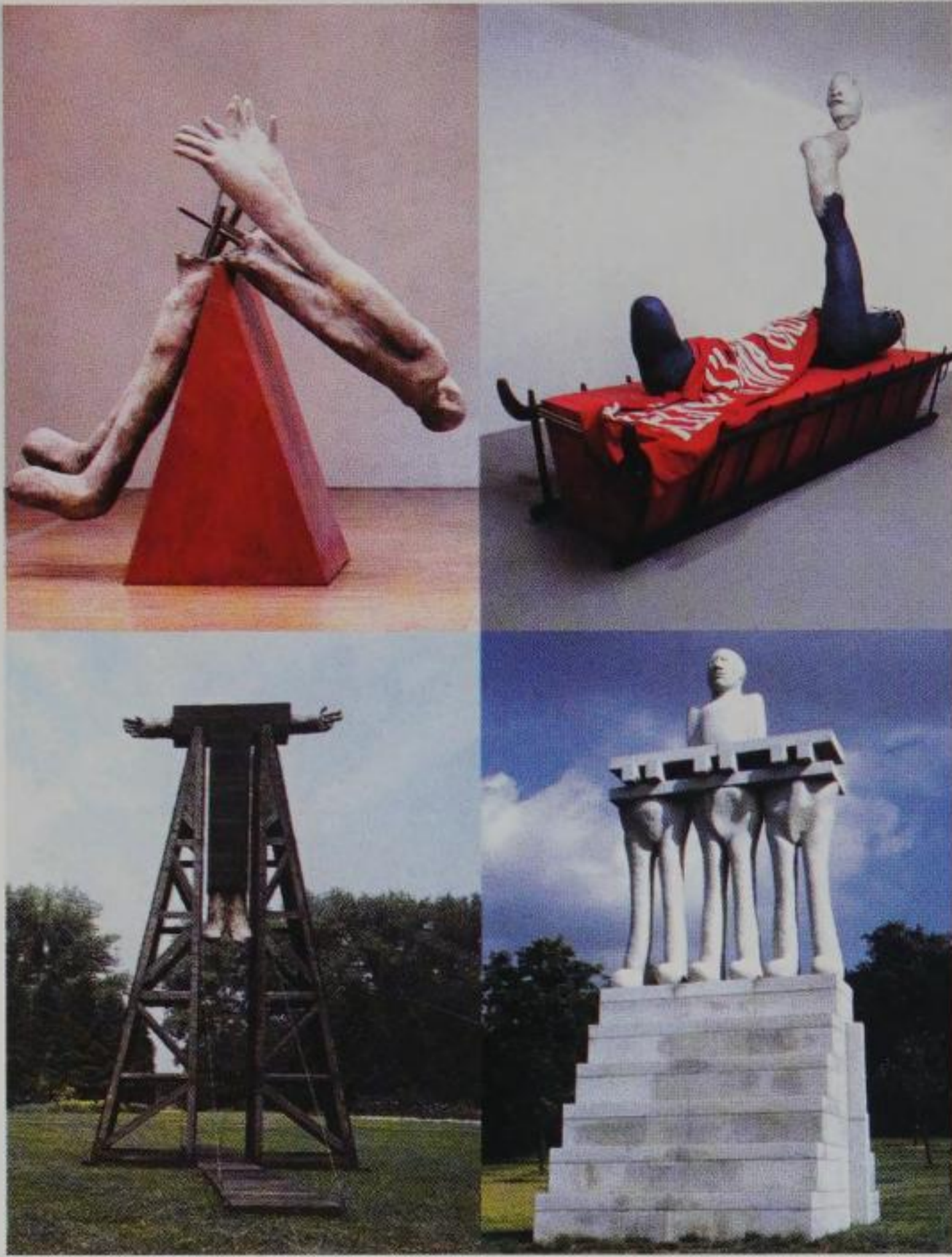
47. **Ülo Sooster**
 (1924, Hiiumaal–1970
 Moscow)
A White Egg
 oil, 475 × 67.5 cm, 1968–70,
 Tartu Art Museum





48. Red Peristil Group
(1968): Pave Dulčić,
Radovan Kogelj, Dena Dokić
and Slaven Šumić
Red Peristil
urban intervention, Split,
1968

49. Alojz Klimo
(1922, Piešťany – 2001,
Bratislava)
Crossroad D
object, acronex,
100 × 100 × 10 cm, 1969



Clockwise from top left:

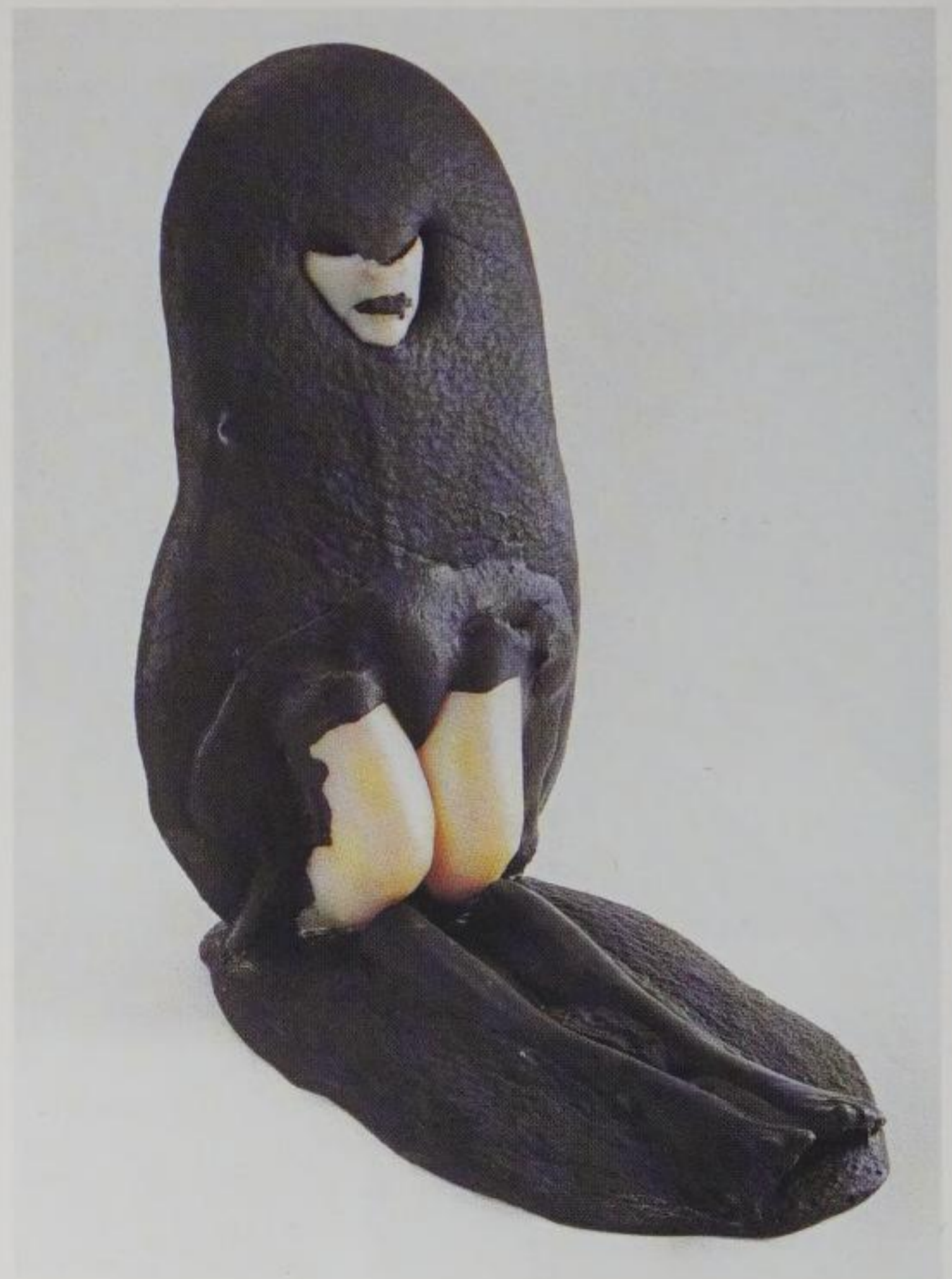
50. **Jozef Jankovič**
(1937, Bratislava)
Spider Web
mixed media, 1969

51. **György Jovánovics**
(1939, Budapest)
Lying Figure
plaster, wood, metal,
life-size, 1969

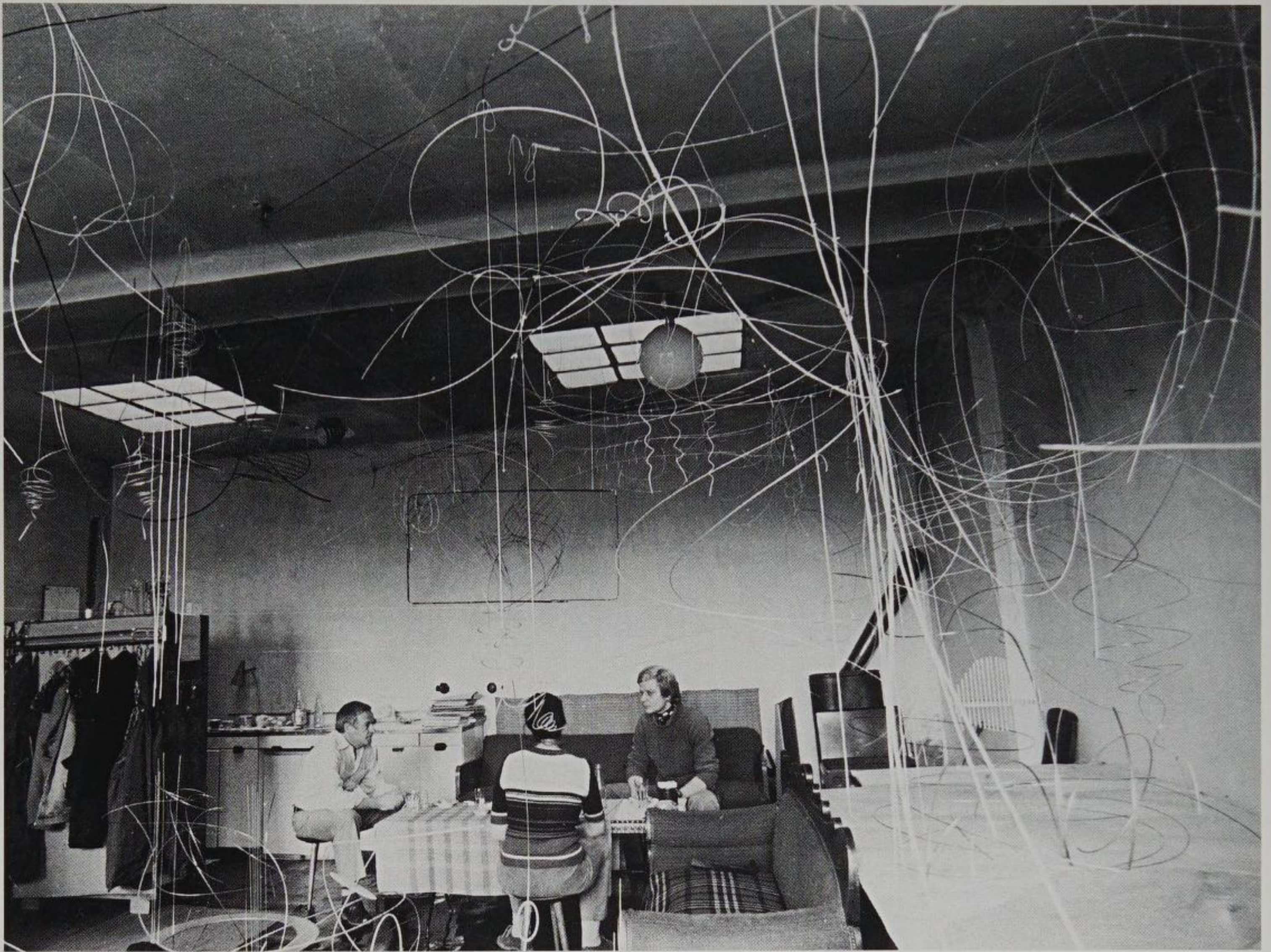
52. **Alina Szapocznikow** (1926,
Kalisz–1973, Praz-Coutant)
Stela
polyurethane, polyester,
79 × 46 × 69 cm, 1969
Sabine Labelle-Rojoux, Paris

Opposite page:

53. **Group OHO** (1966–1971):
Milenko Matanović
(1947, Ljubljana)
Wheat and Rope
photograph of the action,
1969, Museum of Modern
Art Ljubljana

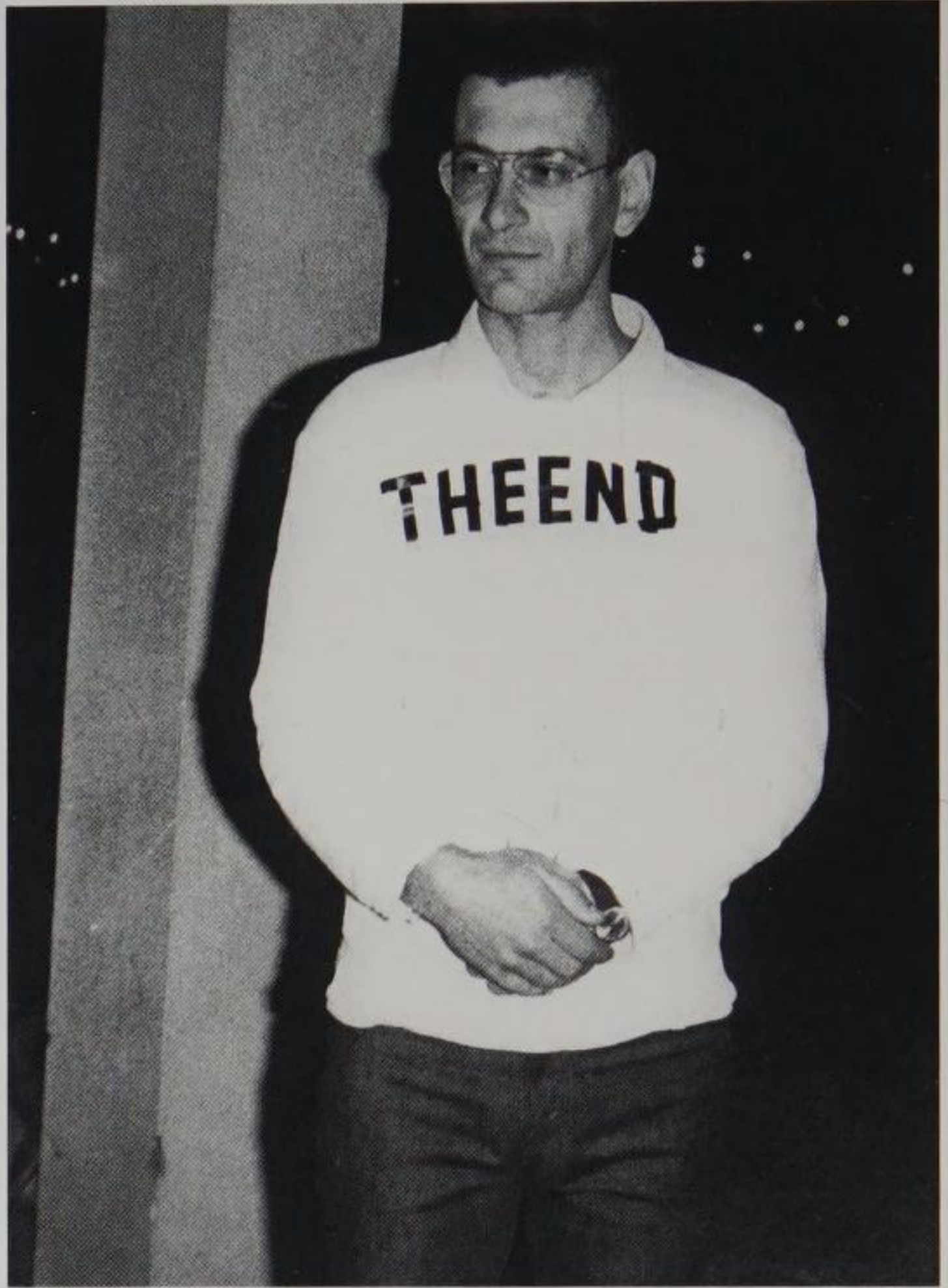
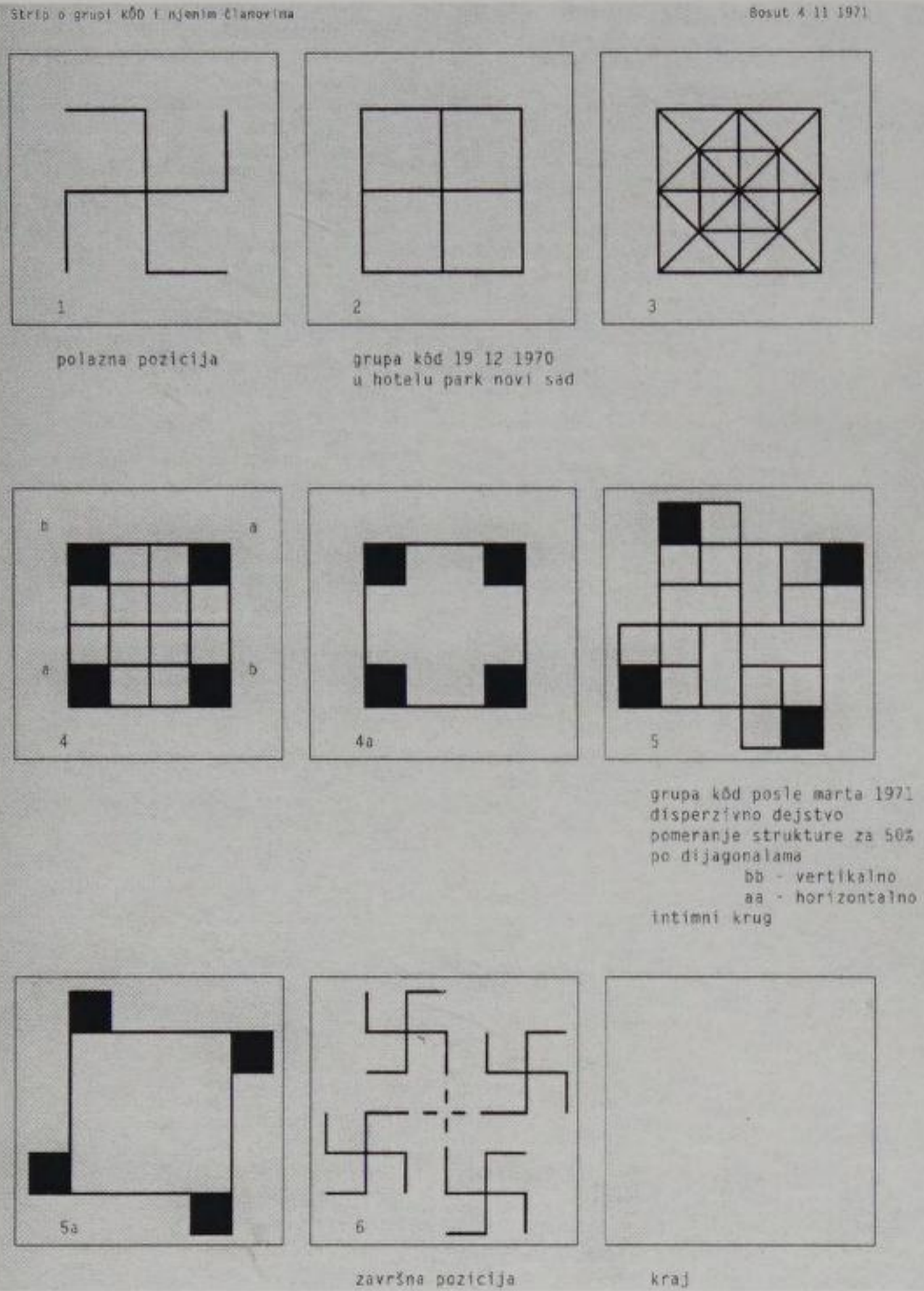






57. Karel Malich
(1924, Holice)
*Karel Malich in the Living
Room of his Flat/Studio*
wire sculptures hanging from
the ceiling, circa 1970

58. Bob Koshelokhov
(1976, Zlatoust) and
Chronicle Group (1976–1981)
Photo of Bob with his Concept
circa 1970

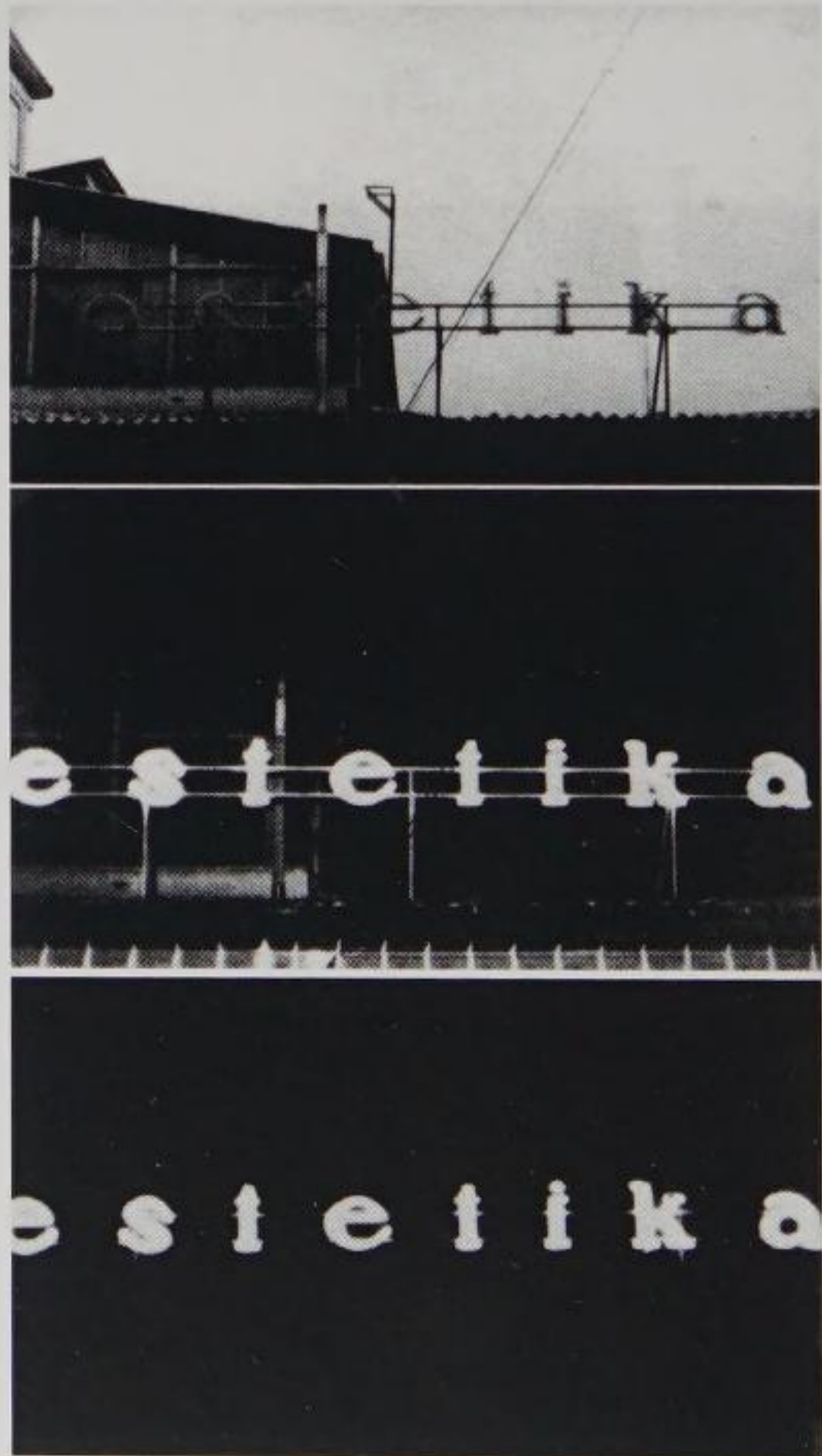


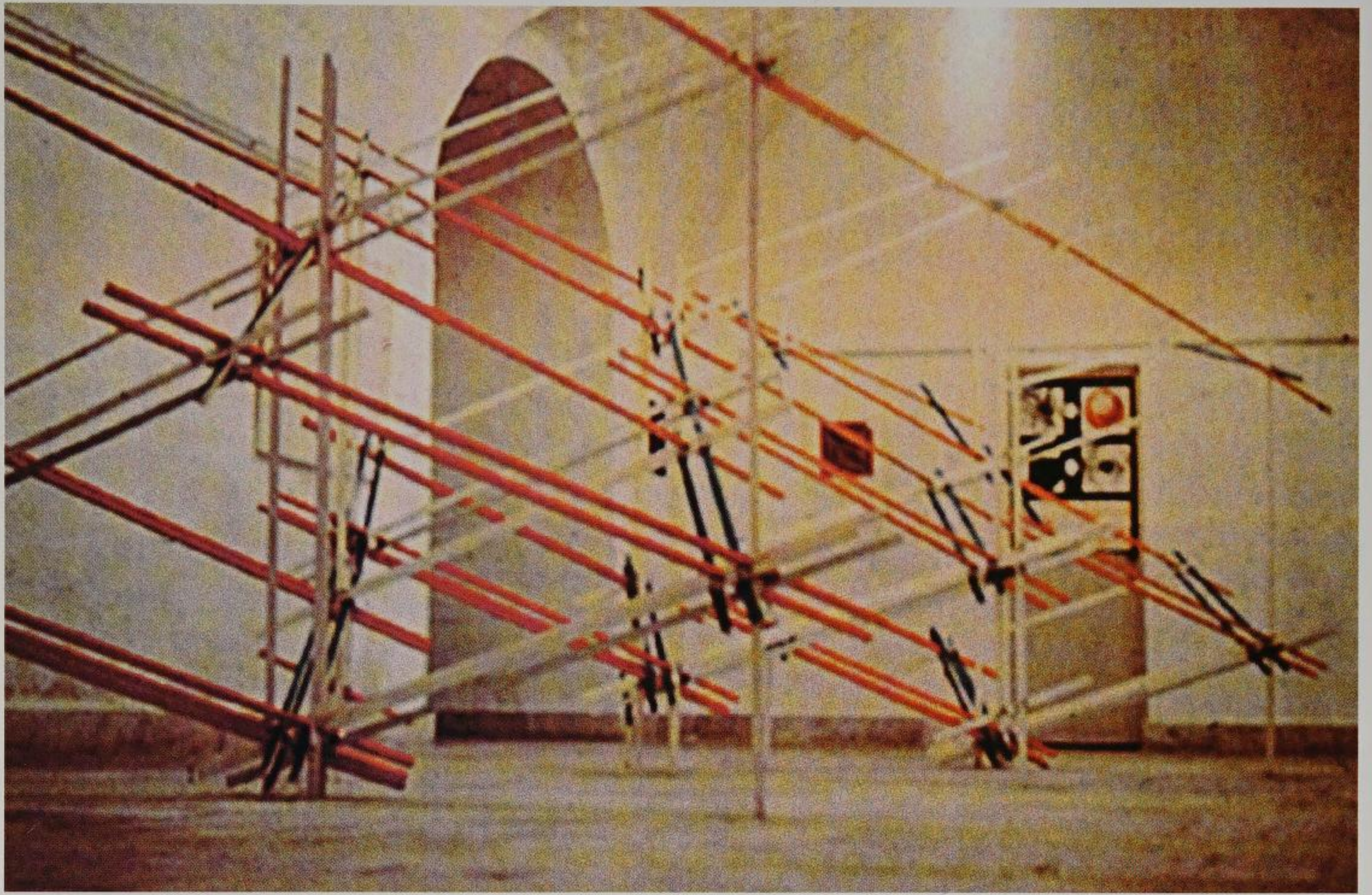
Clockwise from top left:

59. Slavko Bogdanović
 (1948, Niš)
*Comic Book about
 Kôd (Code) Group and its
 Members, L.H.O.O.Q
 Underground Magazine
 for the Development of Human
 Relations N° 9, 1971*

60. Slobodan Tišma
 (1946, Stara Pazova) and
 Čedomir Drča (1950, Odžaci)
The End
 action/performance,
 photograph, 1973

61. Mirko Radojičić
 (1948, Bojište kod Nevesinja)
Grupa Kôd
Estetika
 neon installation,
 photograph, 1970





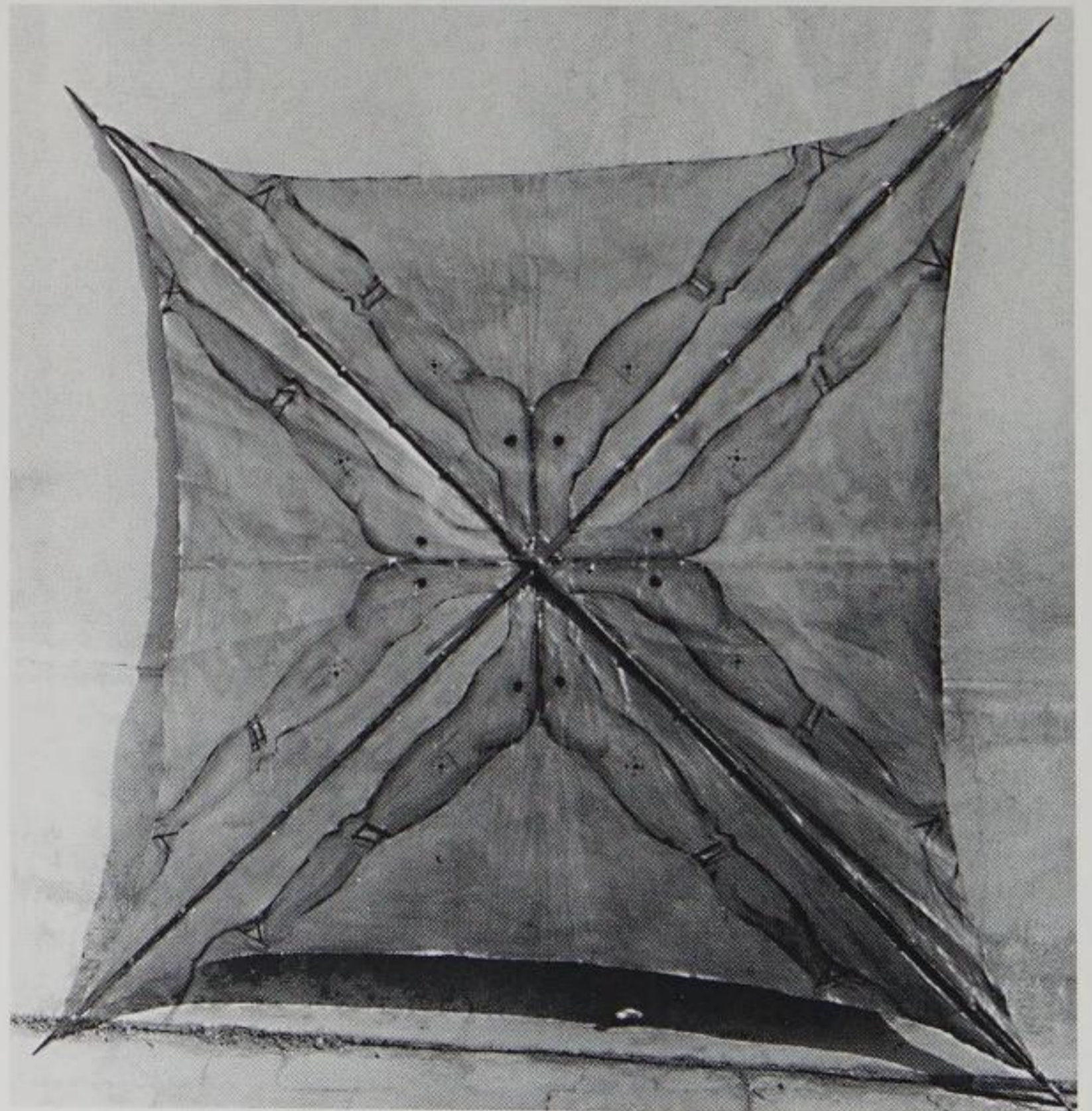
62. **Sigma**
 (1970–1978, Timisoara):
Ștefan Bertalan (1930,
 Hunedoara), **Constatin
 Flondor**, **Doru Tulcan**
 (1943, Satul Cladova)
Barjoints
 installation, 1971

63. **Antanas Gudaitis**
 (1904, Šiauliai–
 1989, Vilnius)
The Prodigal Son
 study 1, oil on canvas,
 92 × 64.5 cm, 1971



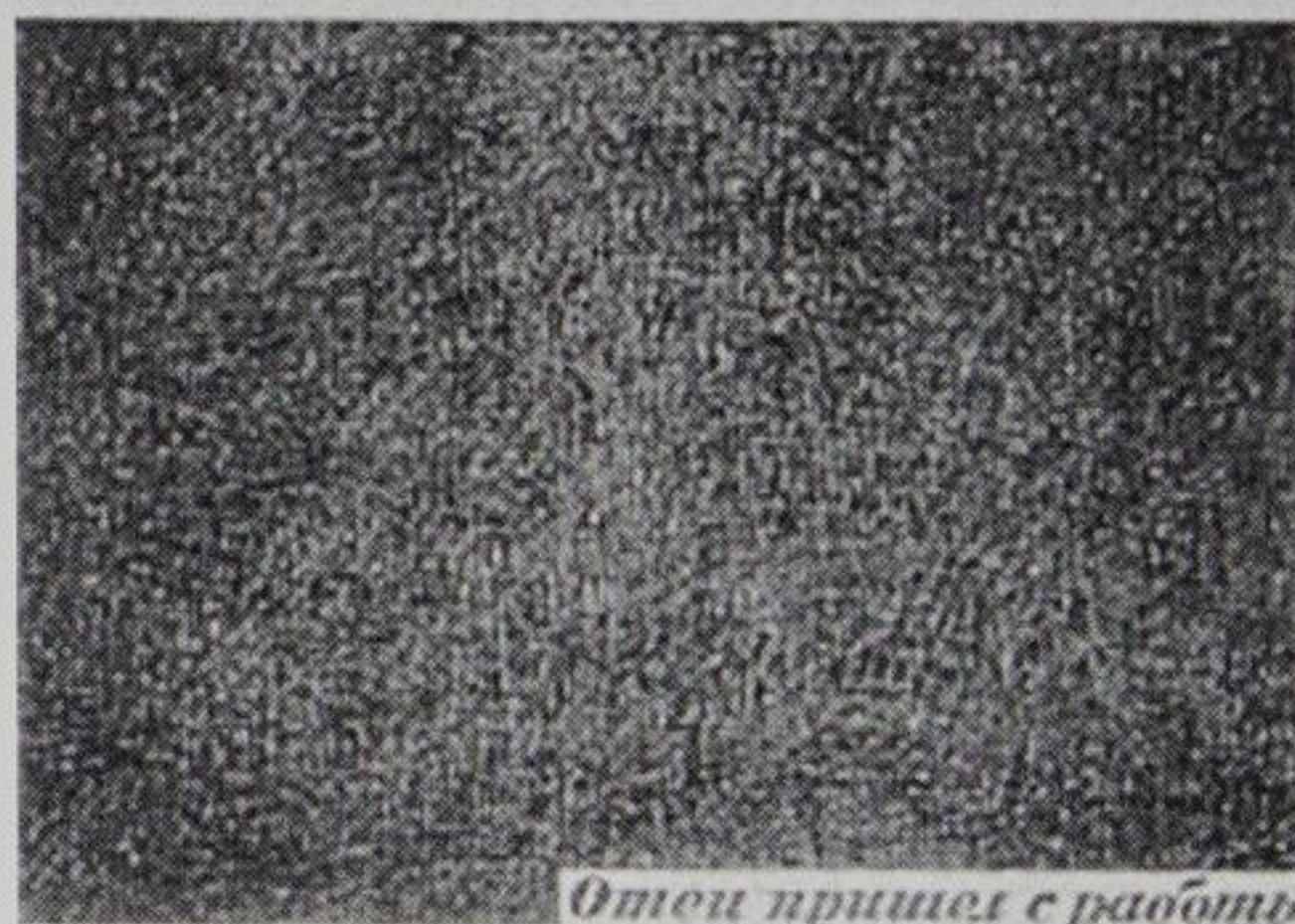
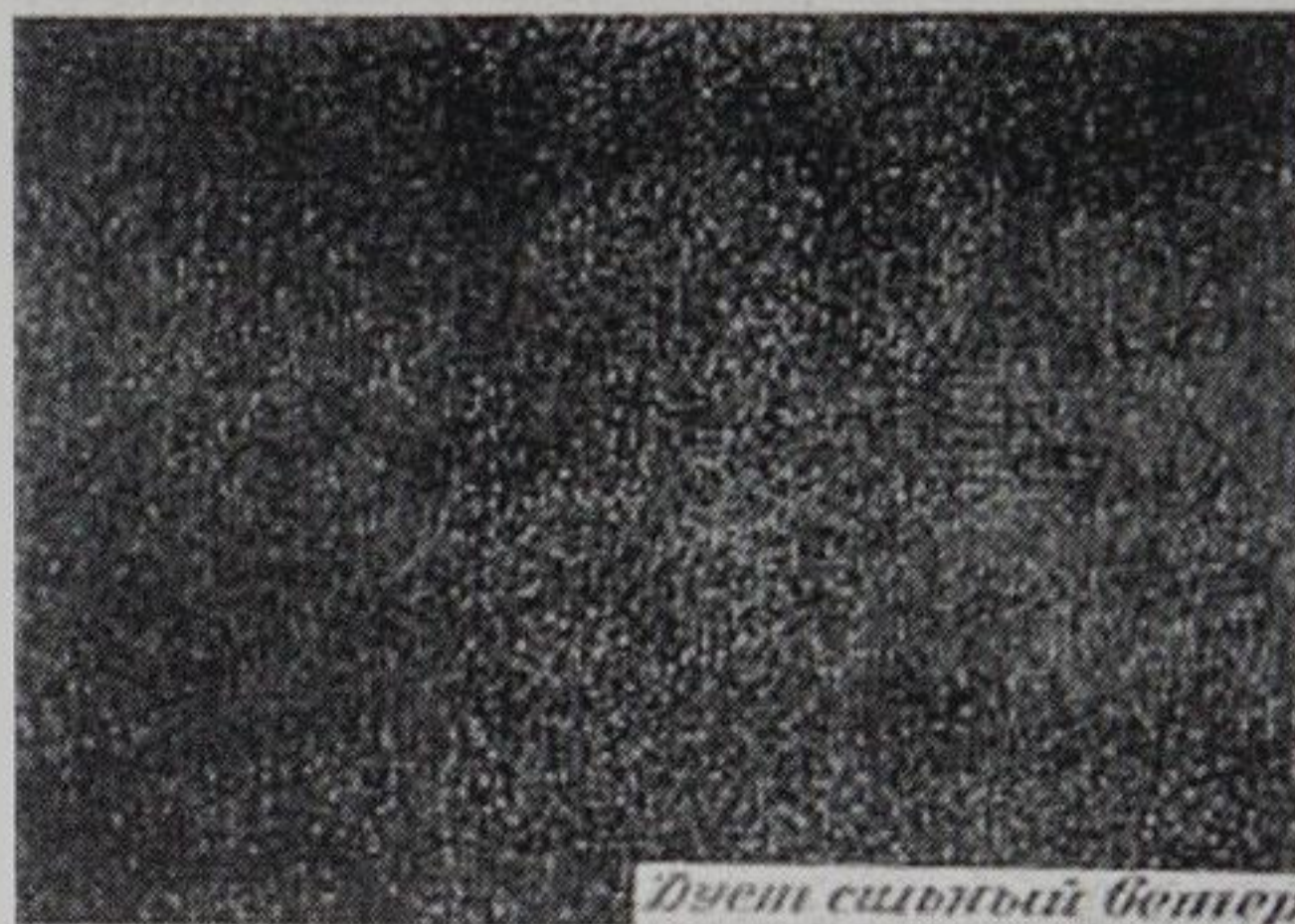
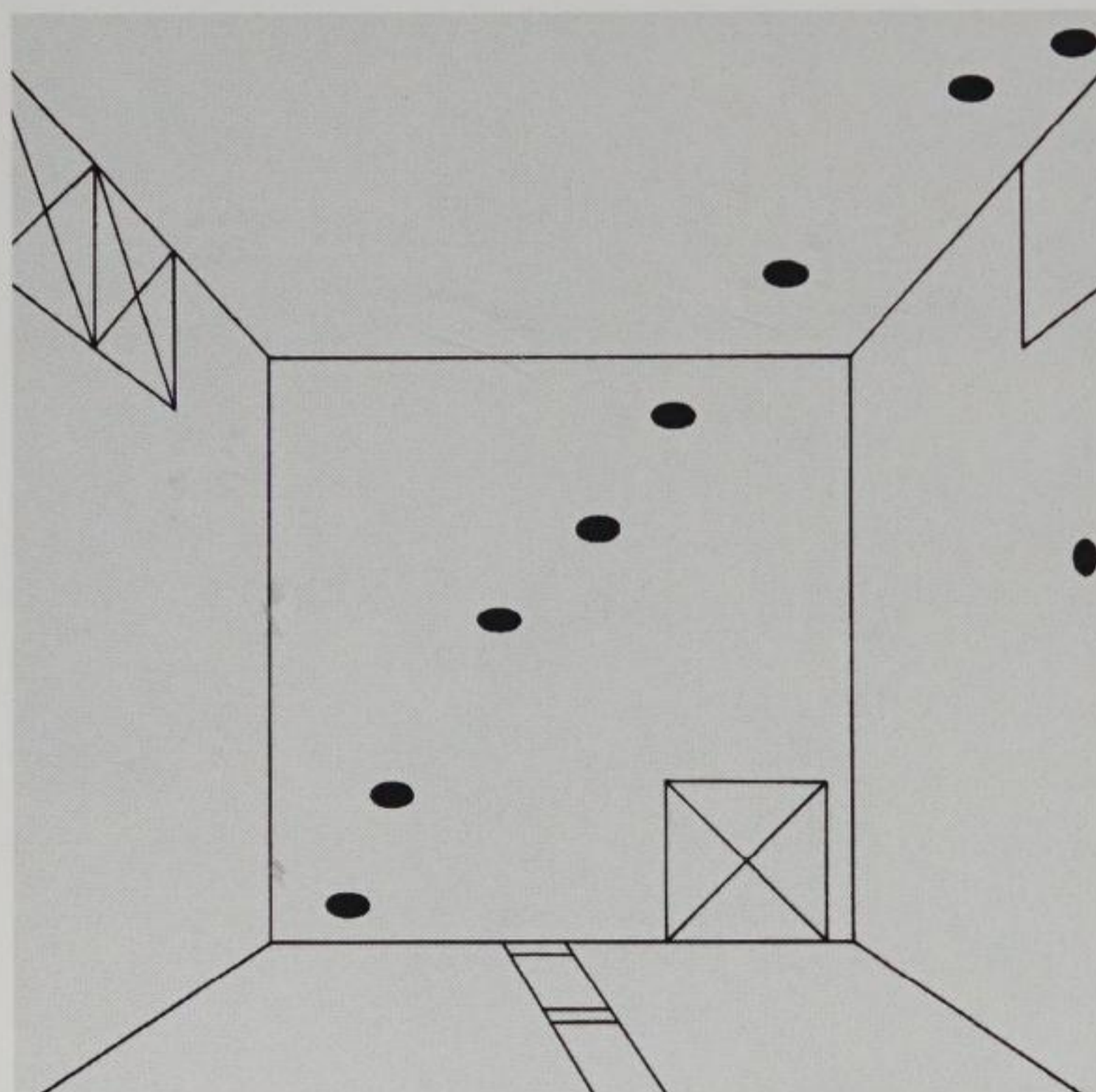
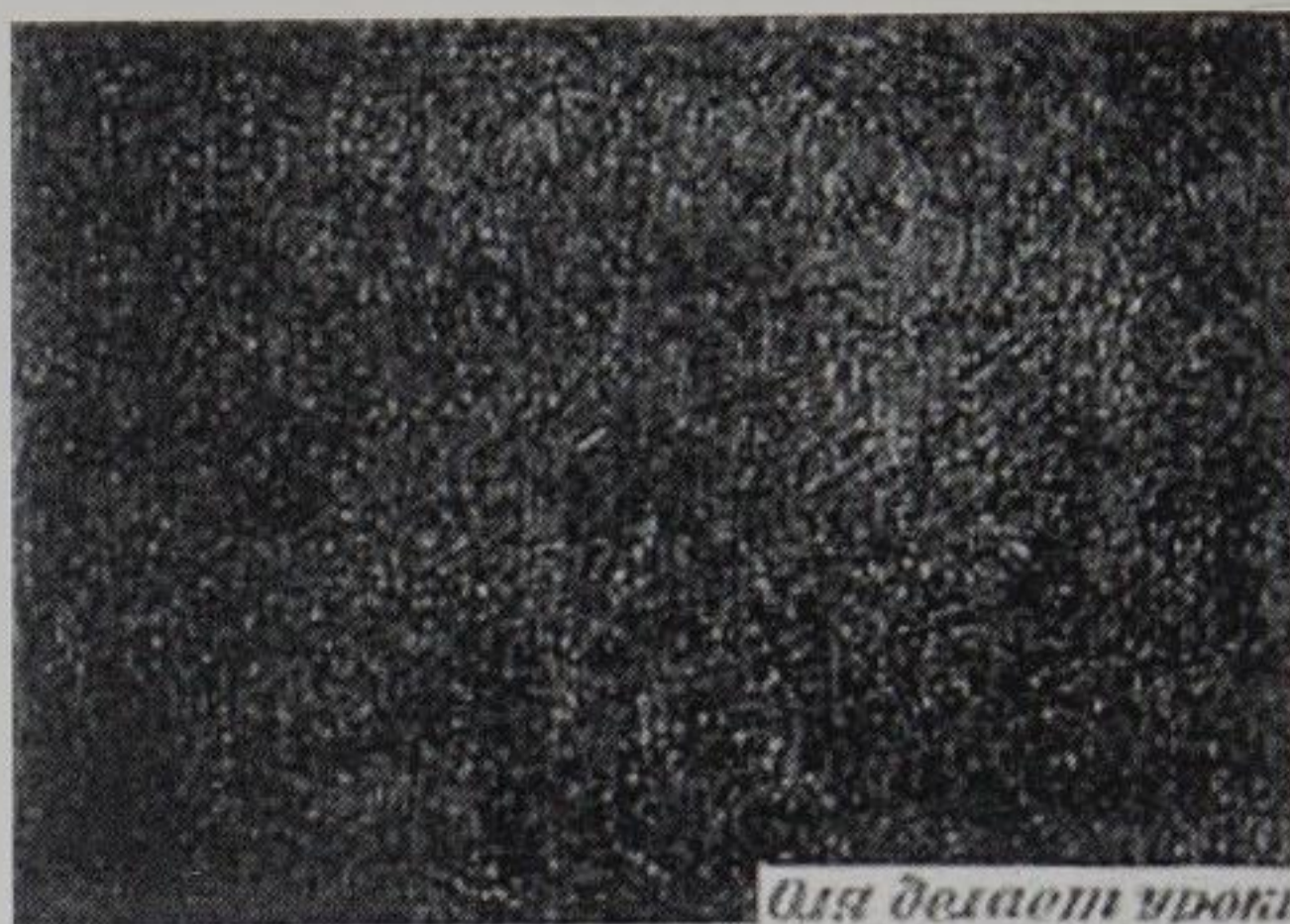
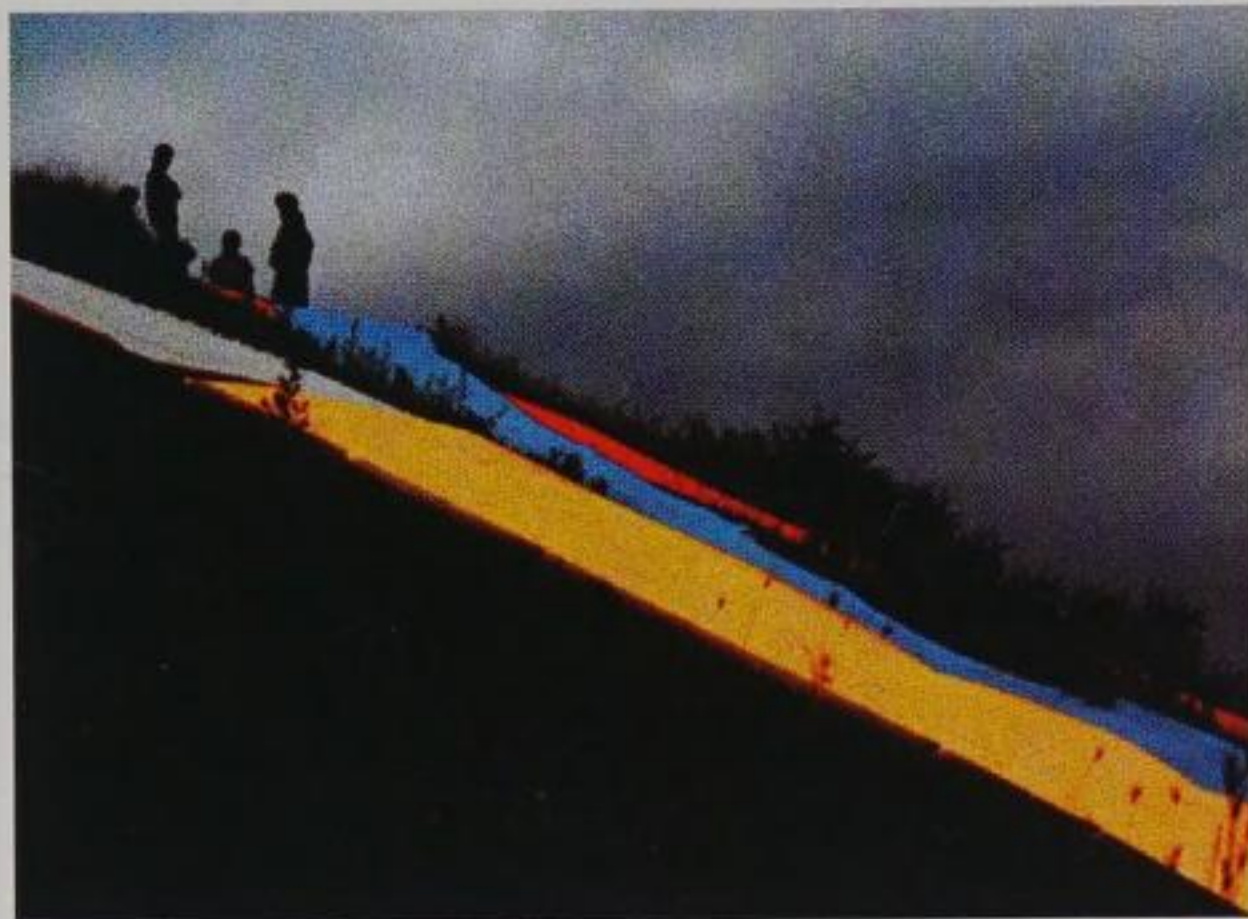
64. Bálint Szombathy
(1950, Pačir)
Lenin in Budapest
photo-action, 1972

65. Horia Bernea
(1938, Bucharest–2000, Paris)
Prapor
object, religious flag, 1973





66. Vitaly Komar
(1943, Moscow), Alexander
Melamid (1945, Moscow)
Post-Art #1 (Warhol)
oil on canvas, 105 × 105 cm,
1973



Clockwise from top left:

67. **Simon Šemov** (1941, Kavadarci), **N. Fidanovski**
A Totem
installation, Lake Lokuv,
50 × 60 cm, 1973

68. **Ilya Kabakov**
(1933, Dnepropetrovsk)
Primakov-Sitting-in-the-Closet
sheets from the album, ink
and coloured pencil on paper,
51.5 × 35 cm each, 1972

69. **Tõnis Vint**
(1942, Tallinn)
Constructions 2
indian ink, 43 × 43 cm, 1972



70. Natalia LL/Lach-
Lachowicz (1937, Zywiec)
Consumer Art
photograph, 100 × 100 cm,
1972, Muzeum Sztuki Łódź

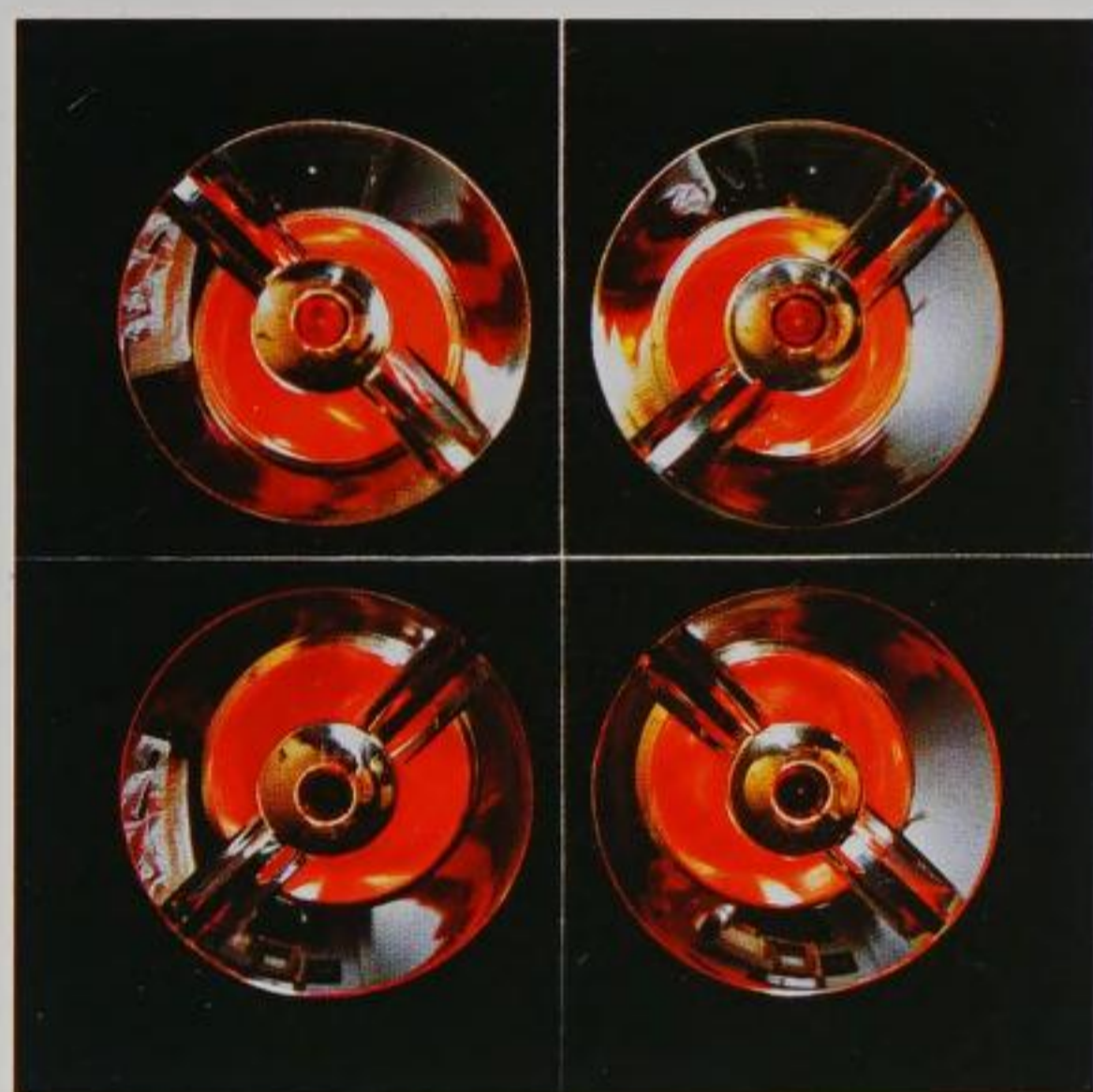
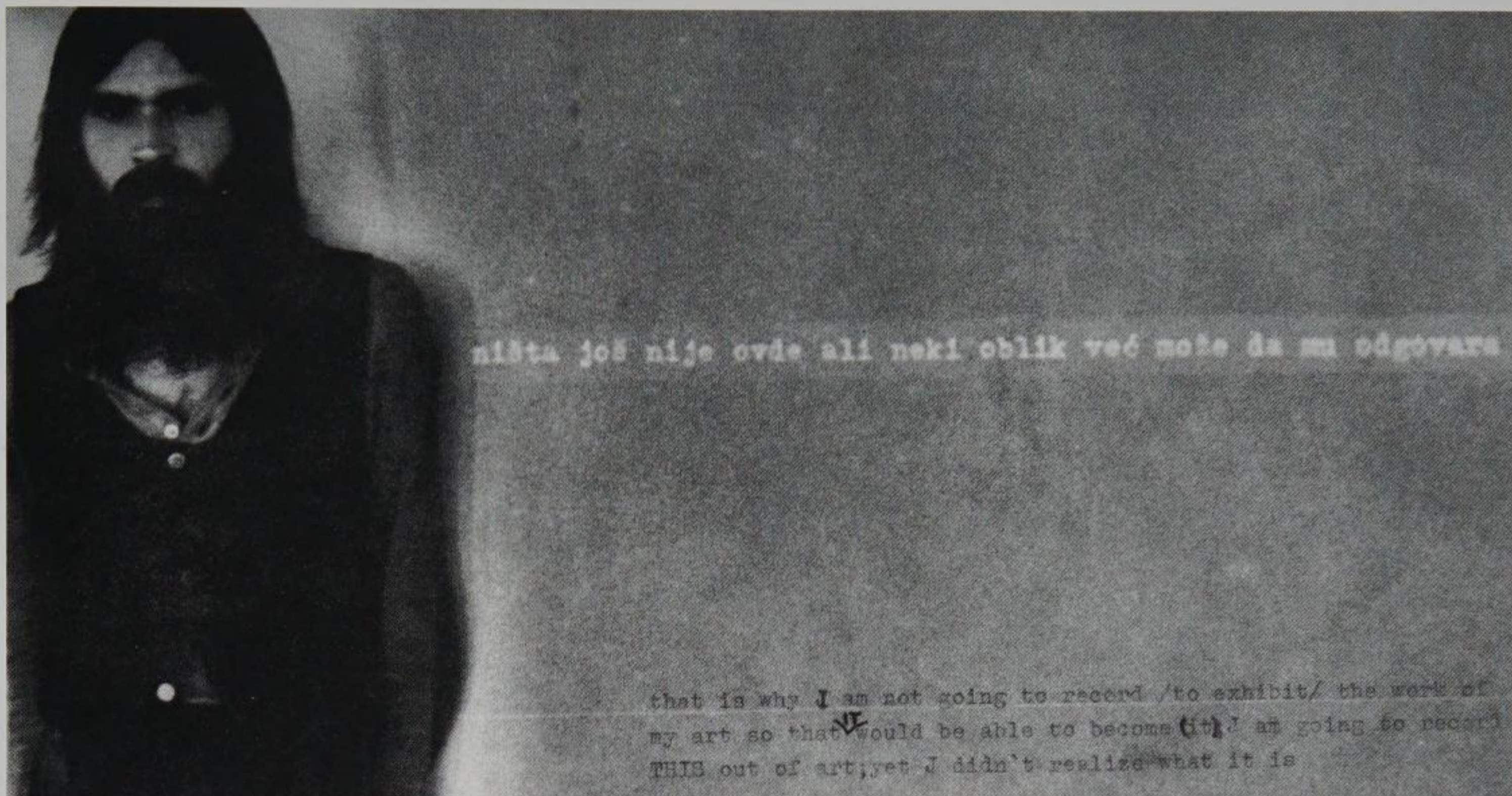


Clockwise from top left:

71. **Edison Gjergo**
 (1939, Tirana–1989, Tirana)
The Epic of the Morning Stars
 oil on canvas, 181 × 191 cm,
 1972

72. **Bruno Vasiļevskis**
 (1939, Rezekne–1990, Riga)
Still Life
 oil on canvas, 50 × 65 cm, 1973

73. **Vincas Kisarauskas**
 (1934–1988)
*Four Self-Portraits with
 Four Observers*
 oil on cardboard, 87 × 122 cm,
 1972

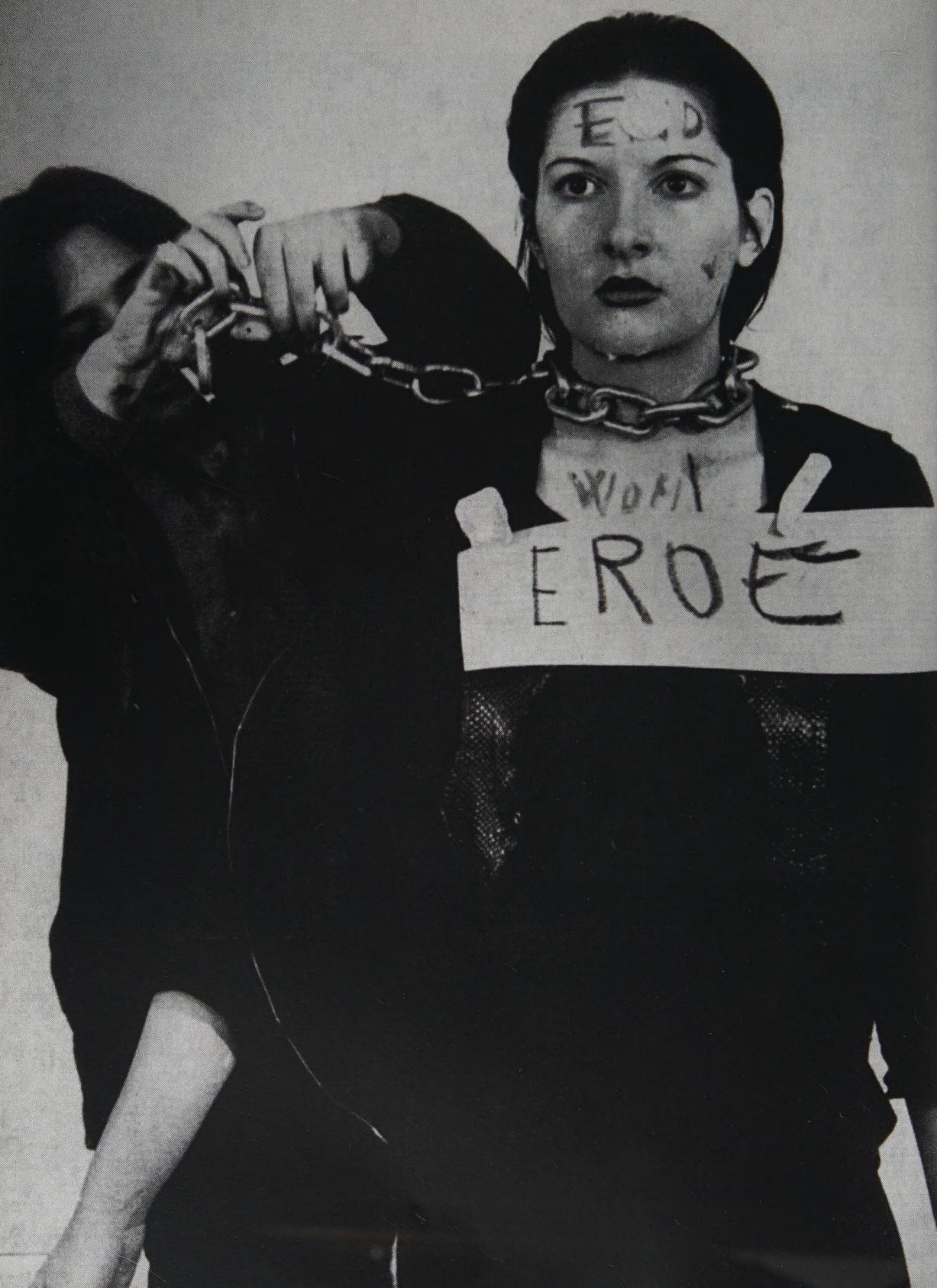


Clockwise from top:

74. Vladimir Kopicl
(1949 – Đeneral Janković)
*Nothing Is Here Yet But
Some Form...*
performance and text, 1973

75. Gerhard Altenbourg
(1926, Rödichen-
Schnepfenthal – 1989)
Marie, Marie
drawing, 65 × 50 cm, 1973

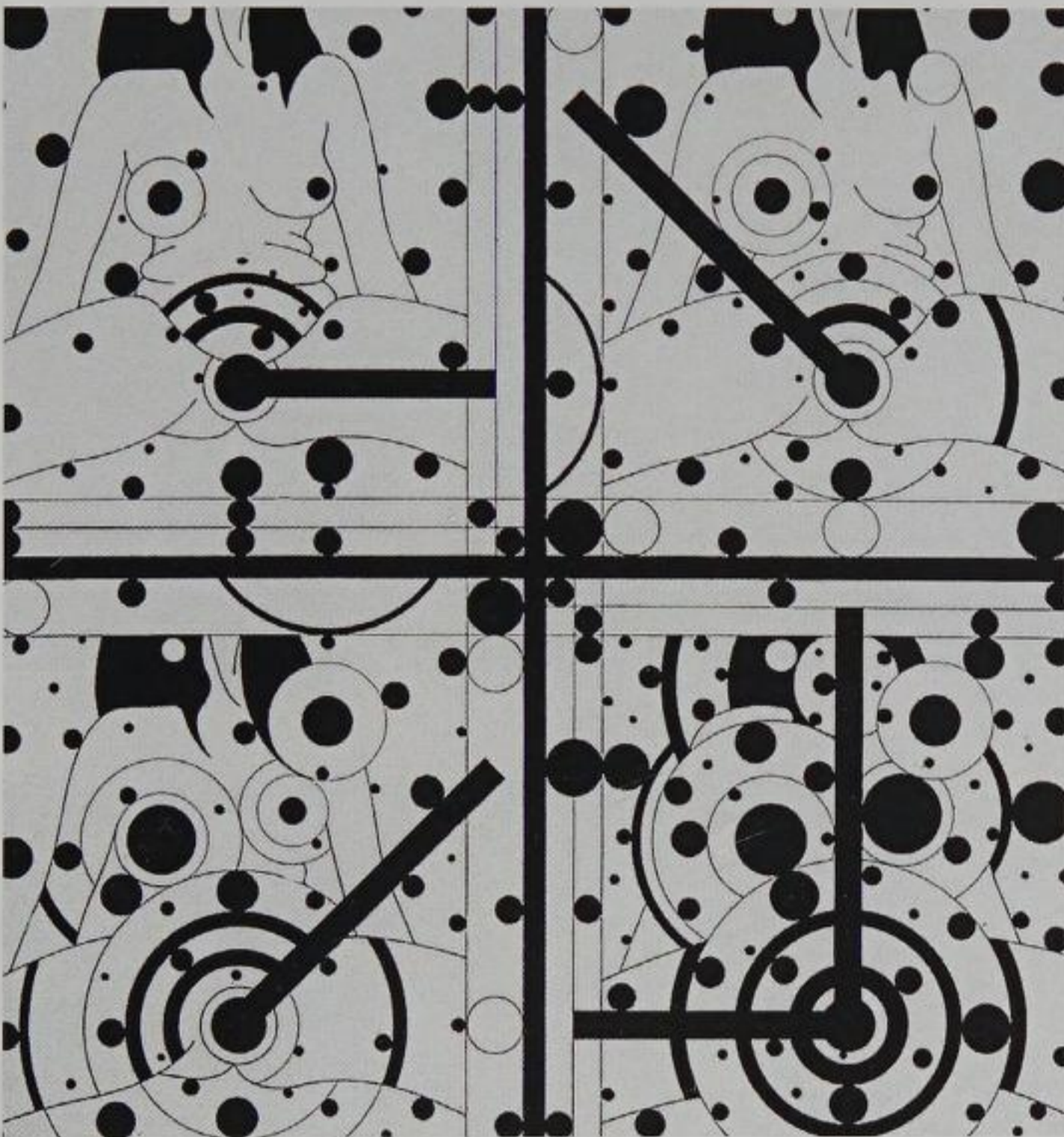
76. Milan Dobeš
(1929, Prerov)
Luminous-Optical Object,
mixed media,
100 × 100 × 30 cm, 1974



EQUID

WOMAN

EROTIC



Opposite page:

77. **Marina Abramović**
(1946, Belgrade)
Rhythm 0
performance, Studio Morra,
Naples, 1974

This page:

78. **Lev Rubinstein**
(1974, Moscow)
Card Index
object (cards in a box),
each card ca. 7 × 12 cm, 1974
photograph from
Transpansse Magazine #2,
Yejsk, 1983

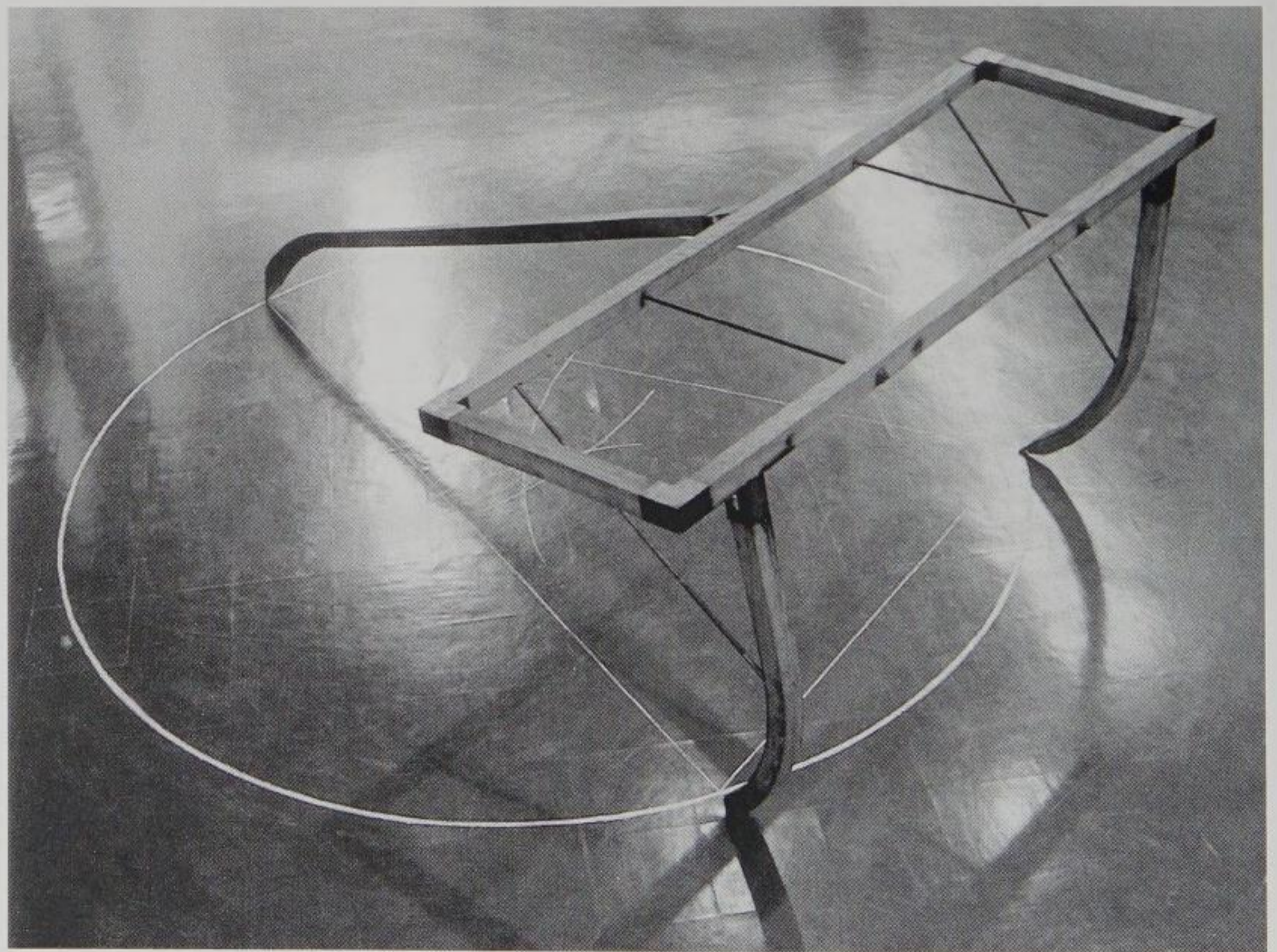
79. **Biljana Tomić**
(1940, Novo Selo)
*Group Photograph with
Joseph Beuys and Family*
Belgrade, 1974

80. **Leonhard Lapin**
(1947, Rāpina)
Woman-Machine X
indian ink, gouache,
62 × 60 cm, 1974



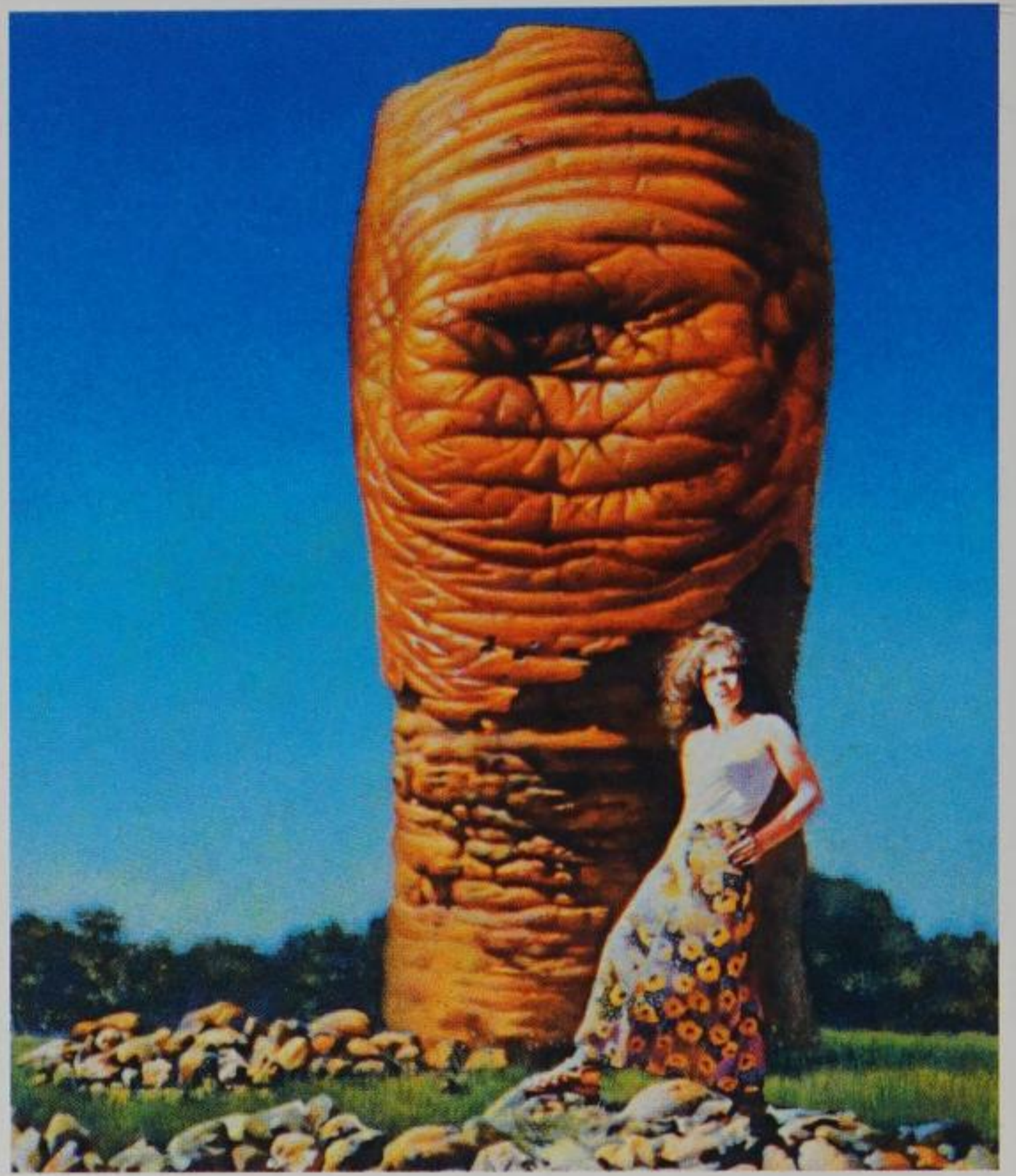
81. Marina Abramović
(1946, Belgrade)
Rhythm 5
performance, 1974

82. Paul Neagu
(1938, Bucharest–
2004, London)
Hyphen
object, 1975





83. A. R. Penck / Ralf Winkler
 (1939, Dresden)
Pamphlet
 latex on canvas,
 285 x 285 cm, 1974



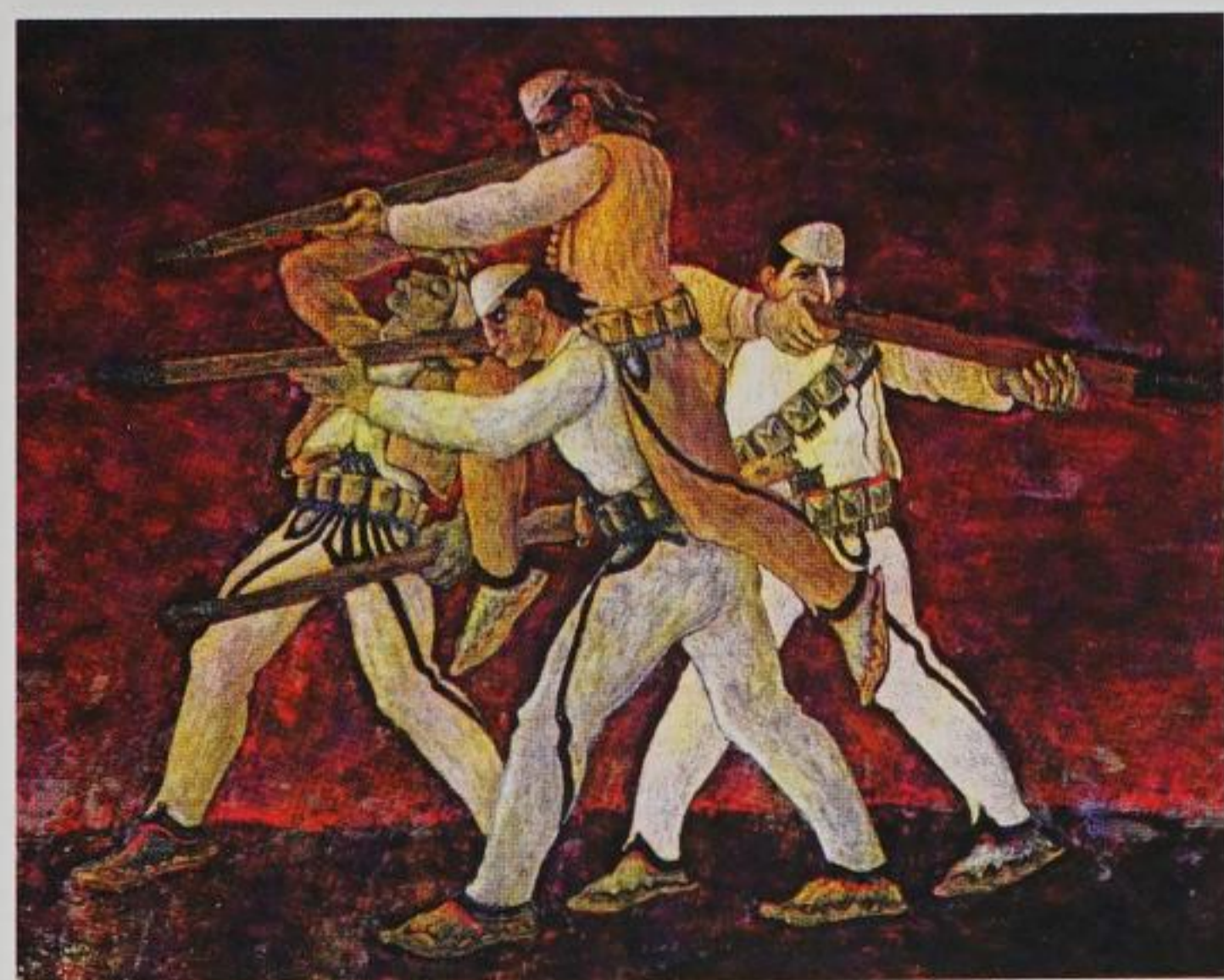
Clockwise from top left:

84. Children's Book
 Illustration in the 60s and 70s
 Пля Кабаков
 (1933, Dnepropetrovsk)
Disappeared Threads
 watercolour, 21 × 29.4 cm,
 1976

85. Miervaldis Polis
 (1948, Riga)
 pages from the book
Island of Colossi
 tempera and varnish
 on cardboard and paper,
 47 × 36 cm, 1975

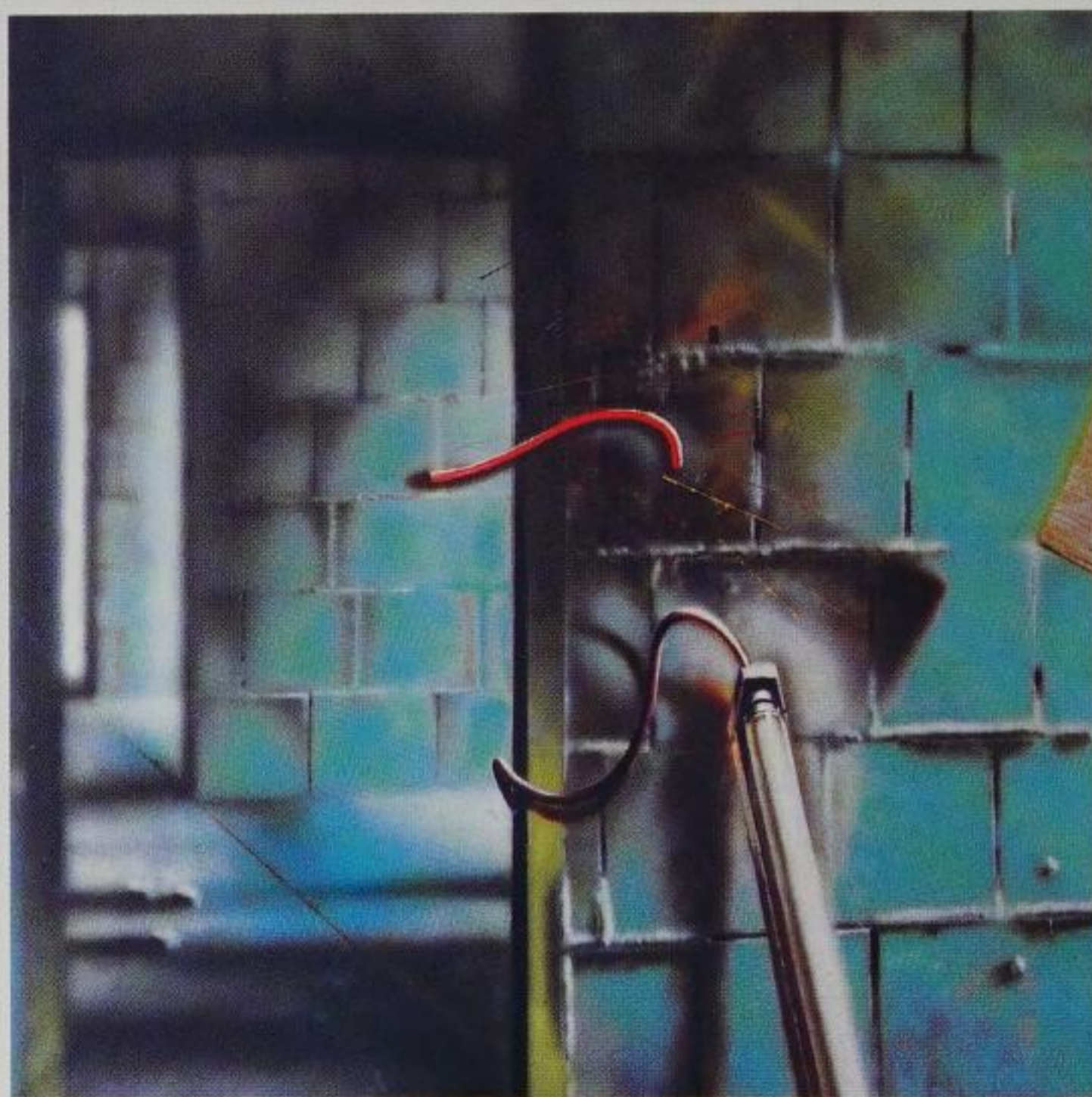
86. Ion Grigorescu
 (1945, Bucharest)
Untitled
 performance for the camera
 in his own studio,
 B/W photograph, 1976





87. The Nest (1975–1979)
The Nest
 performance, 1975

88. Abdurrahim Buza
 (1905, Shkup–1986, Tirana)
Fighters
 oil on canvas, 45.5 × 50 cm,
 1976



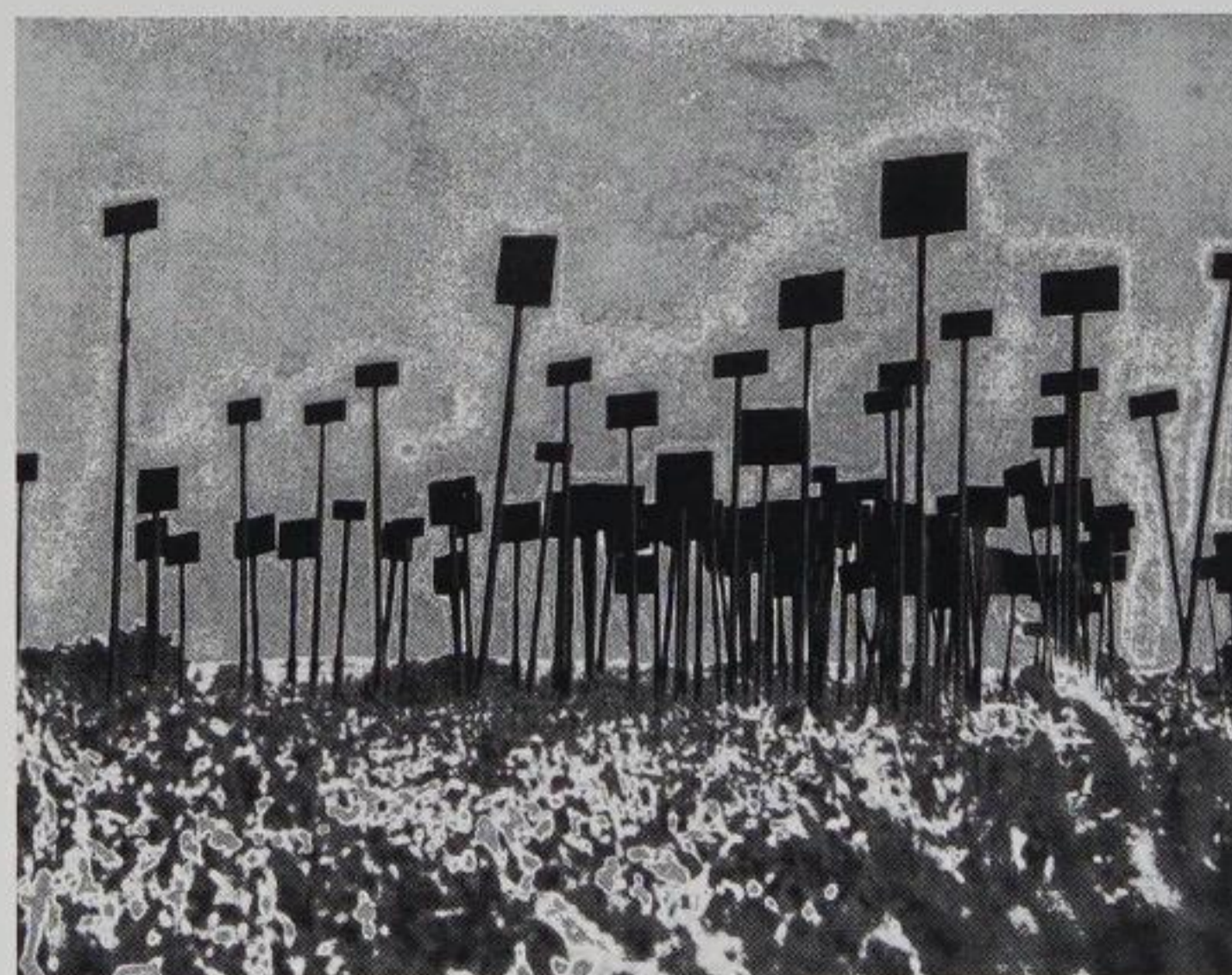
Clockwise from top left:

89. Exhibition at
Bolshoi Sukharevsky
Pereulok
photograph of Leonid Sokov's
installation, 1976

92. Neša Paripović
(1942, Belgrade)
N.P. 1977
8 mm film, 1977

90. Raša Todosijević
(1945, Belgrade)
Was Ist Kunst, Marinela Koželj?
performance, 1976

91. Ando Keskküla
(1950, Saaremaa)
Building
oil on canvas, 130 × 130 cm,
detail, 1976, Tallin Art Hall



Clockwise from top:

93. Jerzy Bereś
(1930, Sławków)
Artist's Monument
performance,
Warcino-Kępcice, 1978

94. Gyula Pauer
(1941, Budapest)
A Forest of Demonstrating Signs
131 wooden signs with
inscriptions, 1978

95. Tomo Šijak
(1930, Kosovo Polje–1999)
Neomusandra
plywood, panel, glass, sheet
metal, 85 × 39 × 16 cm, 1977
The Museum of the City
of Skopje, photograph by
Marin Dimeski



96. Jiří Kovanda

(1953, Prague)

23rd January 1978

I had a date with several of my friends... We were standing in the square talking... Suddenly I started to run... I was running across the square and got lost in one of the streets...

performance, 1978

97. Ivan M. Jirous/Magor

(1944, Humpolec)

A Report on the Third Czech Musical Revival

extract, 1975

Opposite page:

98. Dimitrije Bašičević-Mangelos

(1921, Šid–1987, Zagreb)

Le manifeste sur la mort, acrylic on globe, before 1978,

photograph by

Boris Cvjetanović

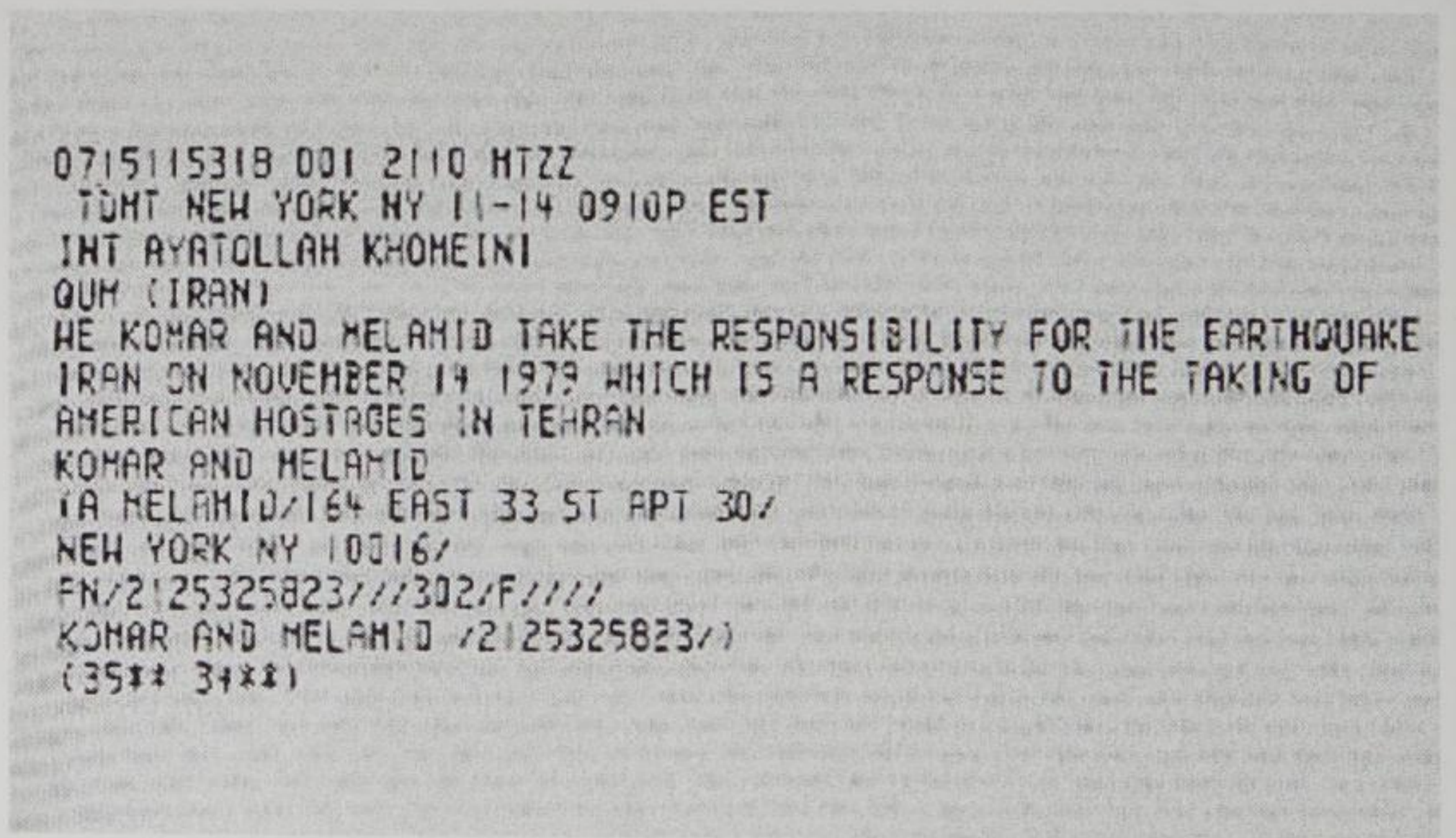
...In our country, things are vastly different and far better than in the West because we live in an atmosphere of complete agreement: the primary culture doesn't want us and we don't want anything to do with the primary culture. ... While scores of people live in confusion in the West — people who would perhaps be among our friends here for their way of thinking — in our country things were defined absolutely once and for all. Nothing we do can be liked by the bearers of the official culture because what we do is useless for creating the impression that everything is fine... Thus one of the paramount signs of art is the creation of turbulence. The aim of the underground in the West is the direct destruction of the establishment. The aim of the underground in our country is the creation of a second culture — a culture which will be totally independent of the official communication channels and social recognition as well as of the hierarchy of values powered by the establishment; a culture whose goal is not to destroy the establishment because to do so would be to run into the arms of the captor. Instead, a culture that frees those who want to join it of a skepticism that there's no way to do anything and shows them that there's plenty to do if those who do it wants little for themselves and more for others. This is the only way of living out life's remaining years that await all those who agree with the words of Hussite chiliast Martin Húska: "A loyal person is worth more than any sacrament."



la mort

le monde

le monde
sur la mort

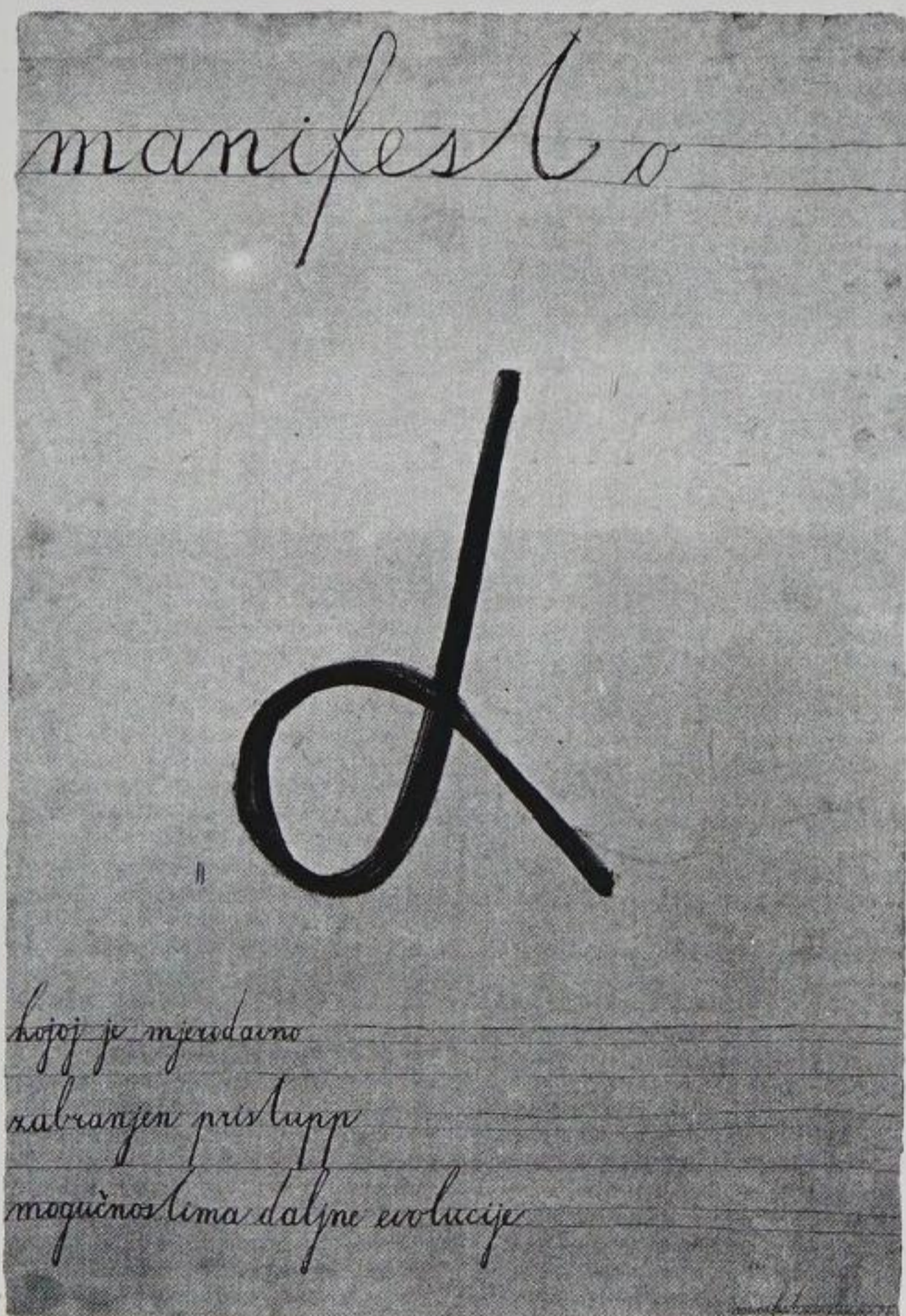


Clockwise from top left:

99. Bernhard Heisig
(1925, Breslau, now Wrocław)
illustration for Ludwig Renn's
novel *War*
lithography (chalk, ink), 1979

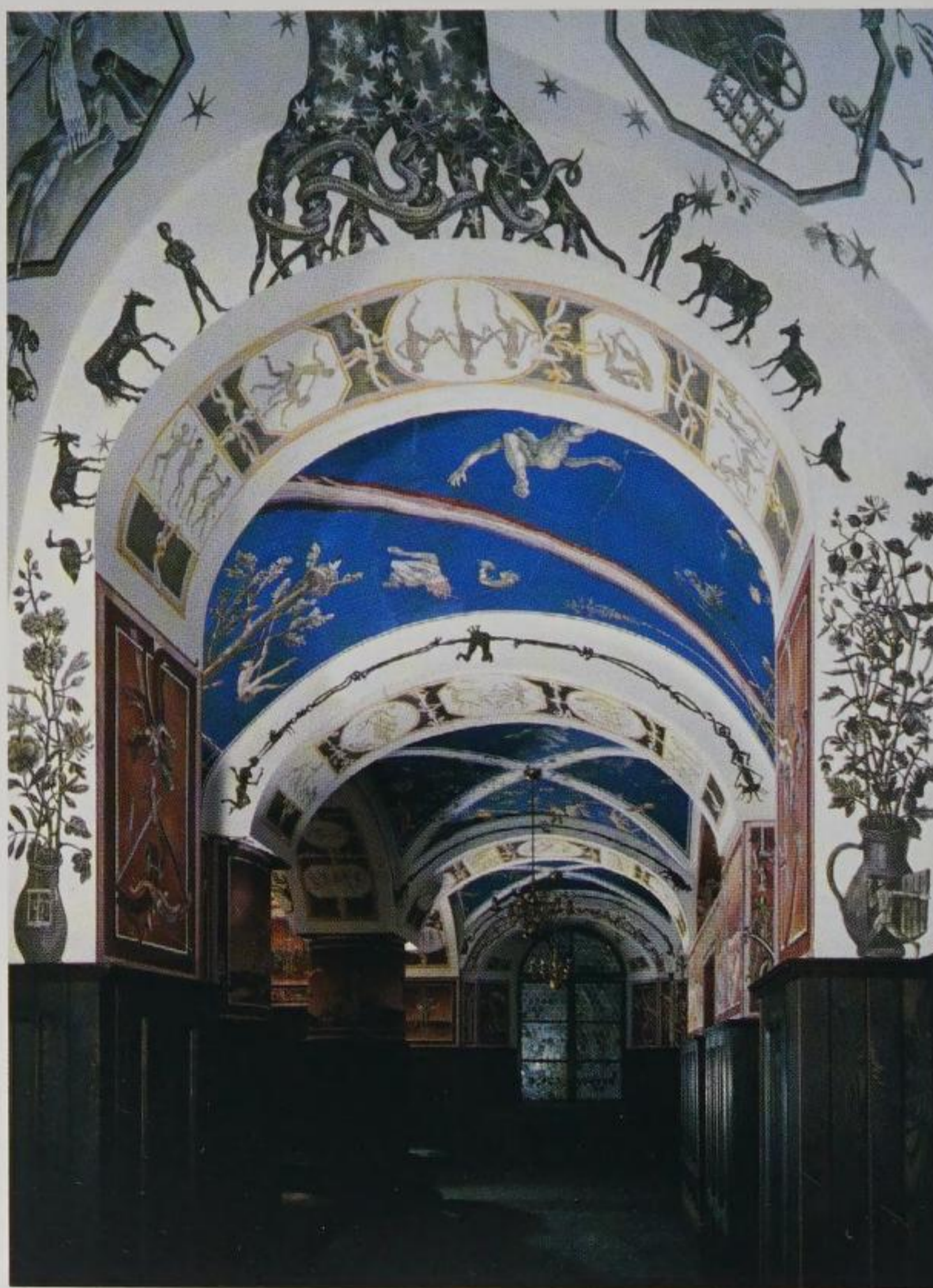
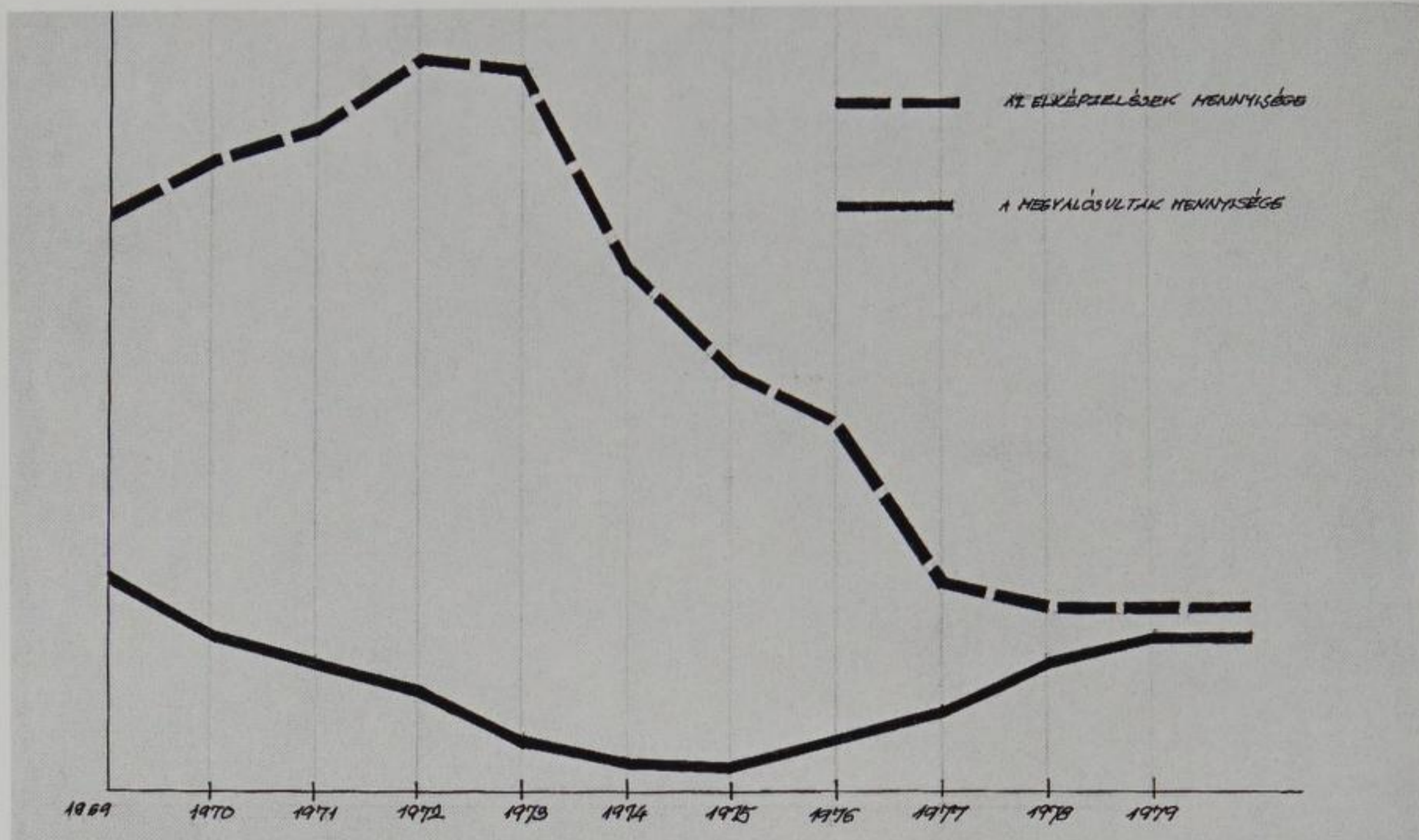
100. Ričardas Povilas
Vaitekūnas (1940, Kaunas)
The Meadow in Pažaislis
oil on canvas, 73 × 92 cm, 1978

101. Vitaly Komar (1943,
Moscow), Alexander
Melamid (1945, Moscow)
Telegram, 1979



102. Conceptual Seminar
 photograph of participants
 1978–1985

103. Dimitrije Bašičević-
 Mangelos
 (1921, Šid–1987, Zagreb)
Manifest on Alpha (α)
 from the series *Manifestos*
 painting on wood, 110 × 75 cm,
 before 1978

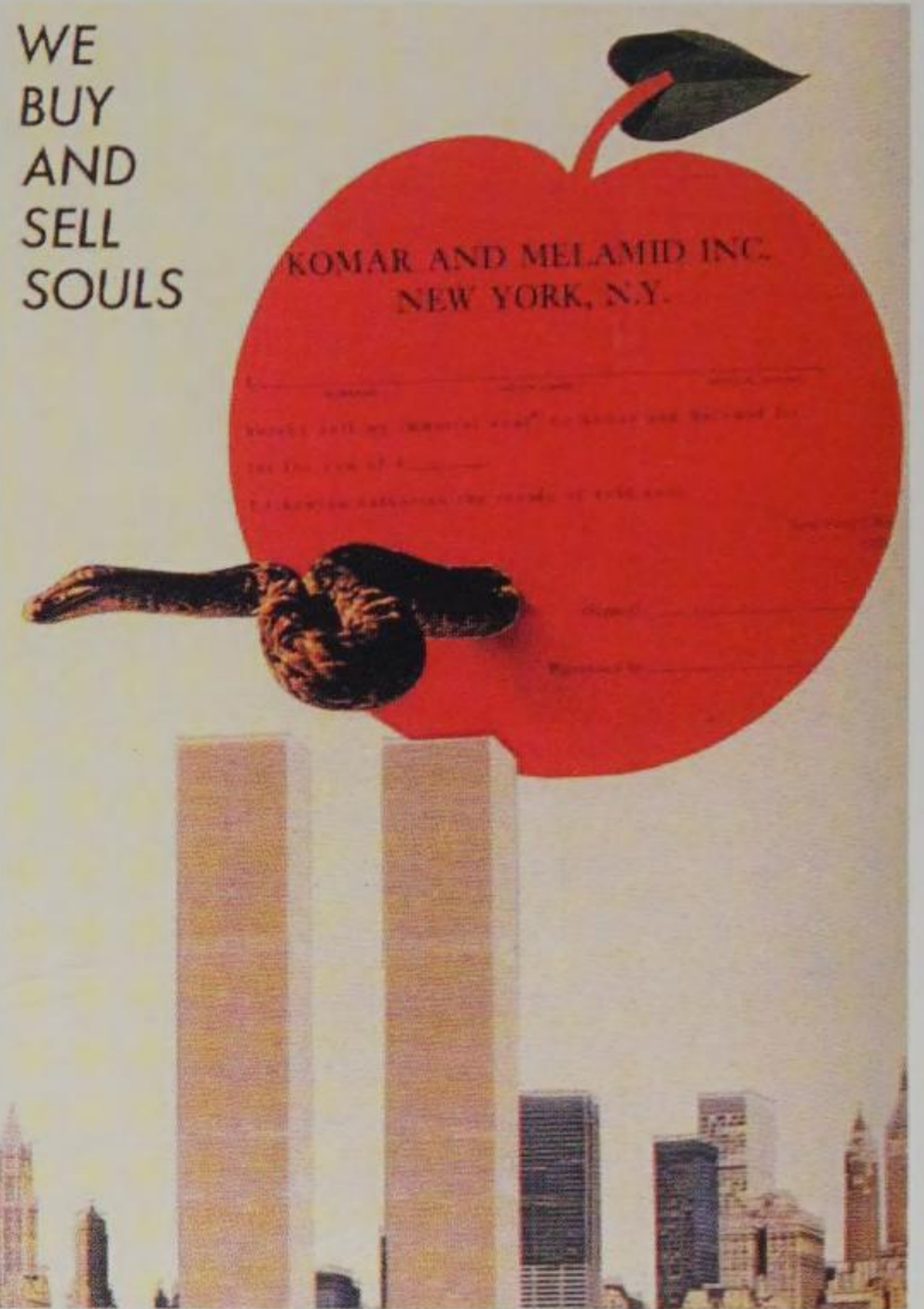


Clockwise from top:

104. Miklós Erdély (1928, Budapest–1986, Budapest)
The Proportionment of Ideas and Their Realisation
 diagram, ink on paper,
 21 x 29 cm, 1979

105. Petras Repsys (1940, Šiauliai)
The Seasons
 frescos, Vilnius University,
 1977–1985

106. Muchomory (1978)
Metro
 action in Moscow metro, 1978

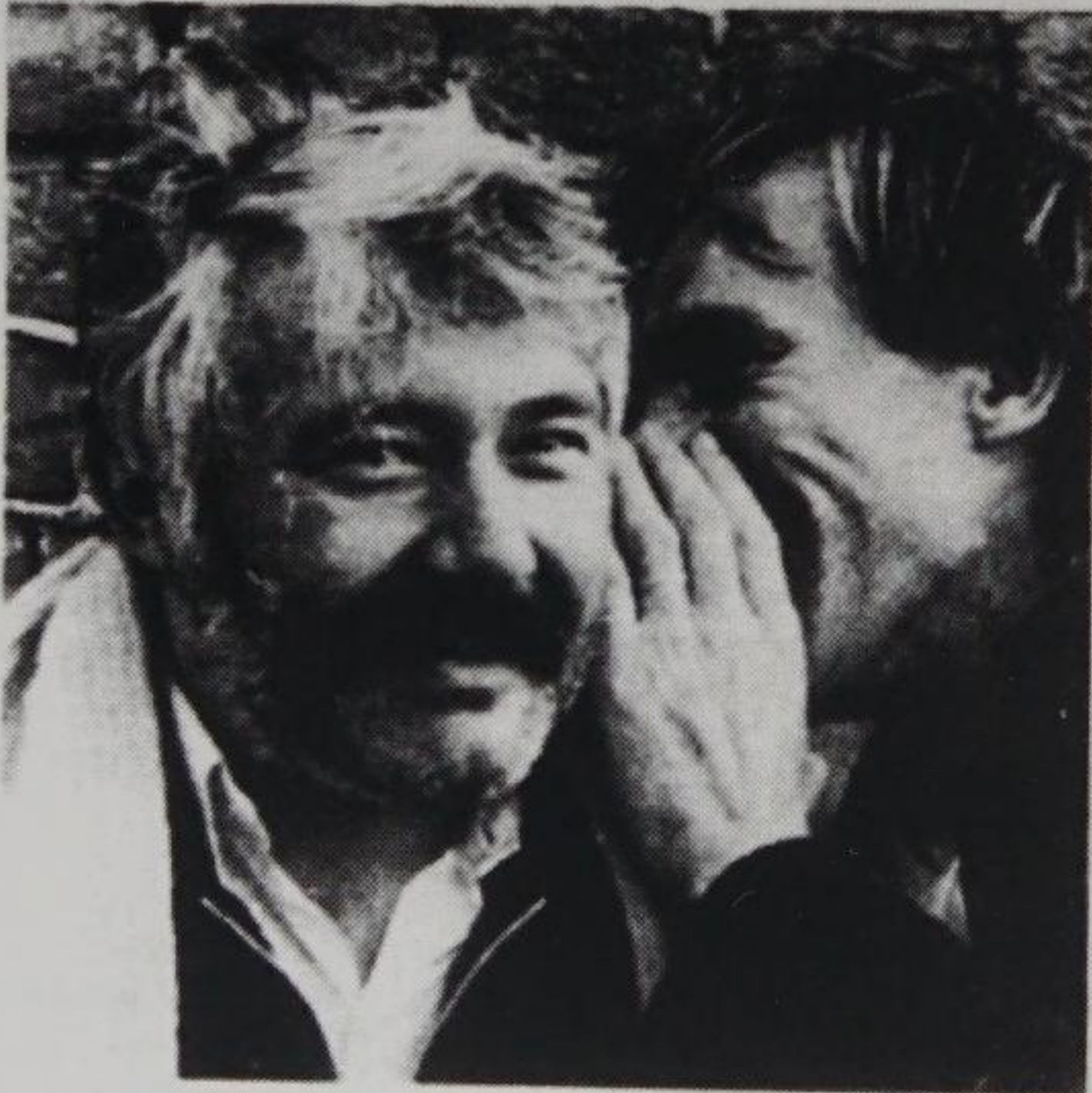
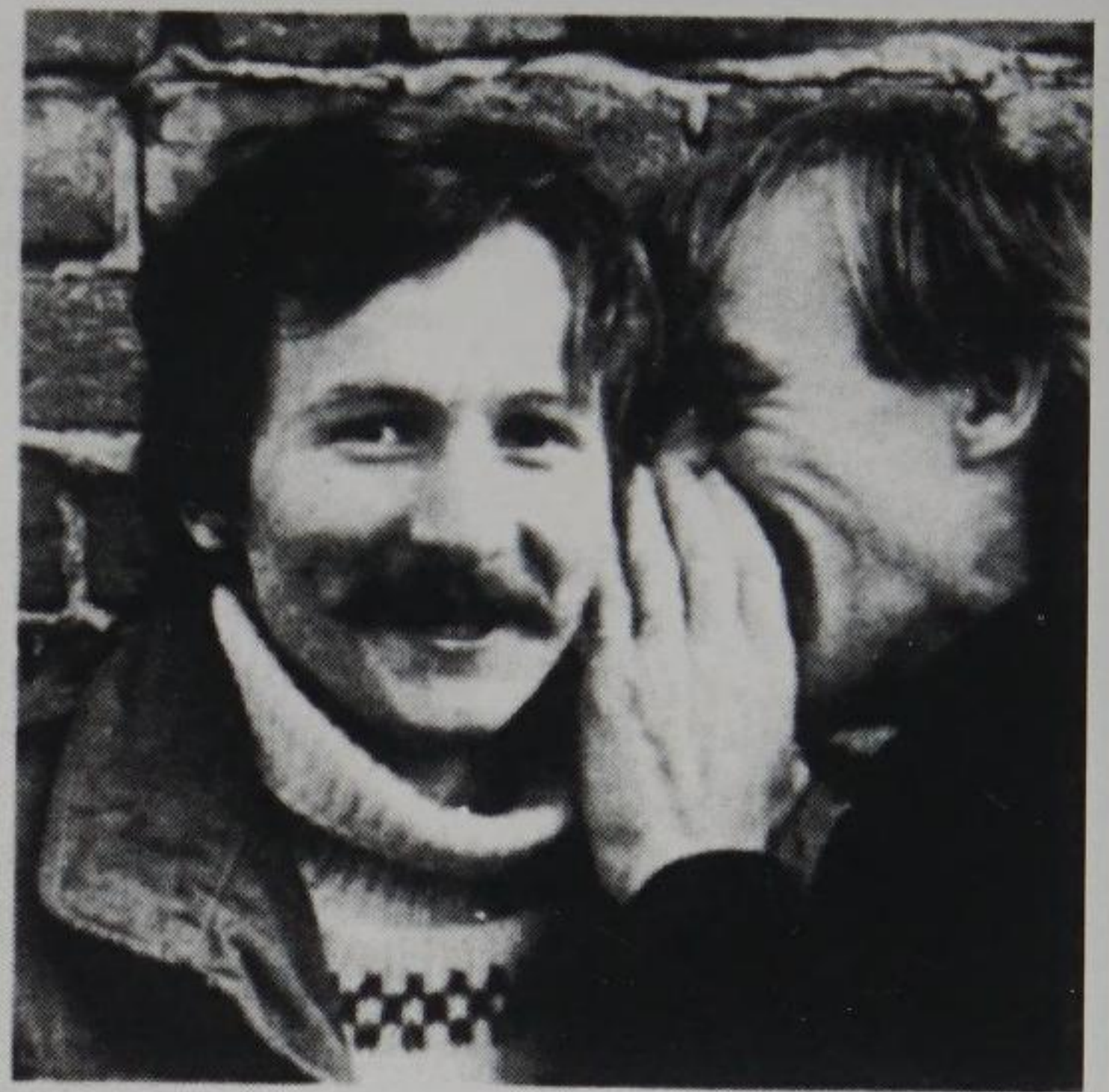


Clockwise from top left:

107. *A/ya Magazine*
(1979–1986)
cover of issue N° 7, 1979

108. Vitaly Komar (1943,
Moscow), Alexander
Melamid (1945, Moscow)
We buy and sell souls
offset poster,
ca. 70 × 50 cm, 1978

109. Boro Ivandić
(1951 Putešvica)
BWA
series of projects,
late 70s–early 80s



PORUKE - MESSAGES

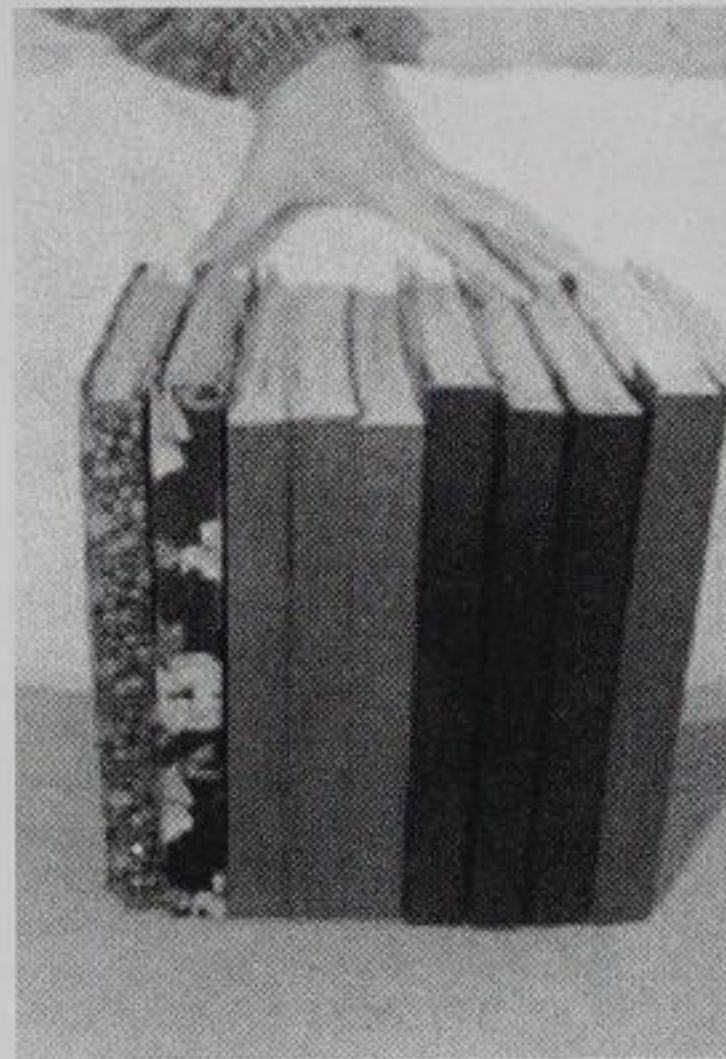
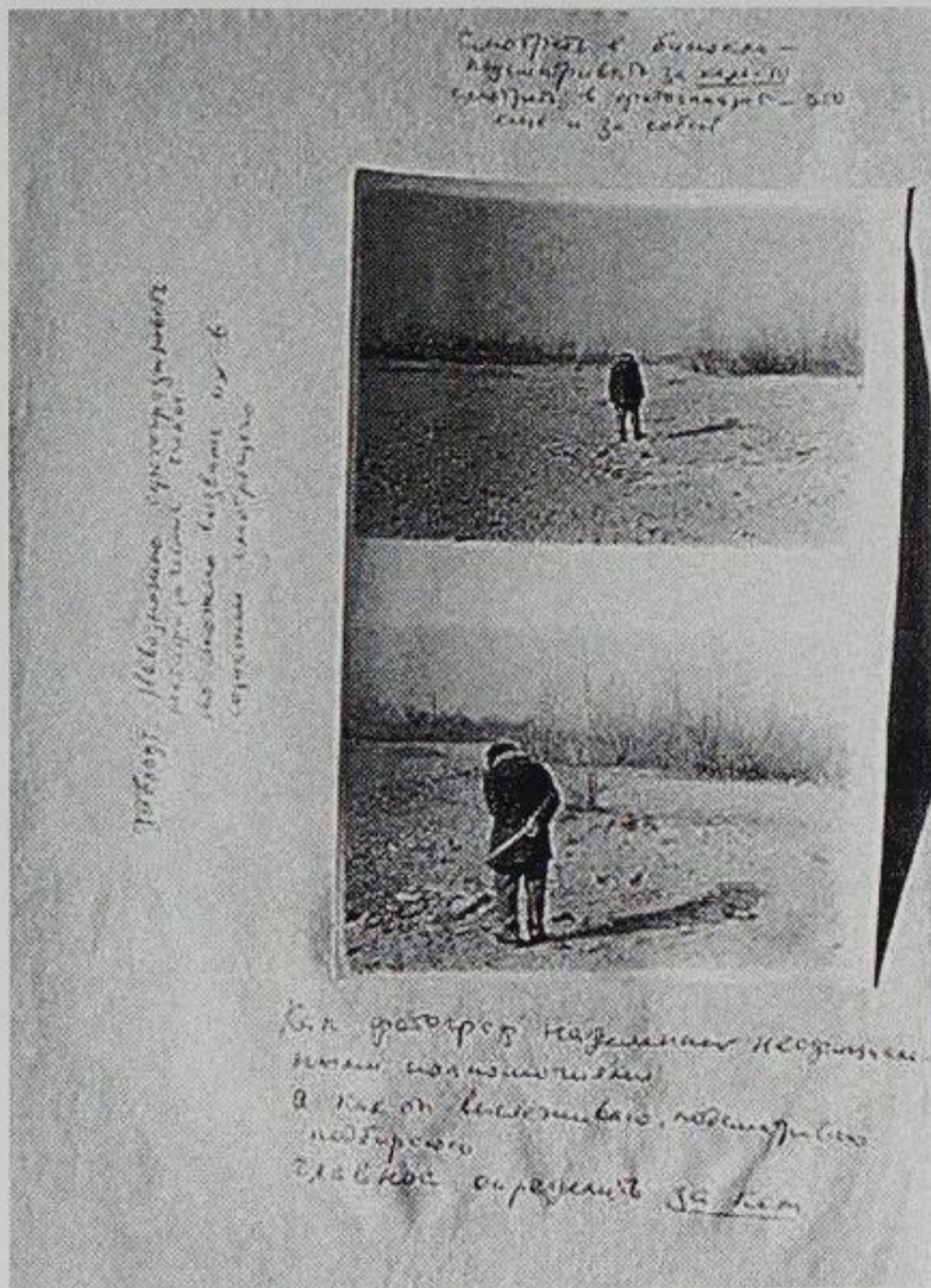
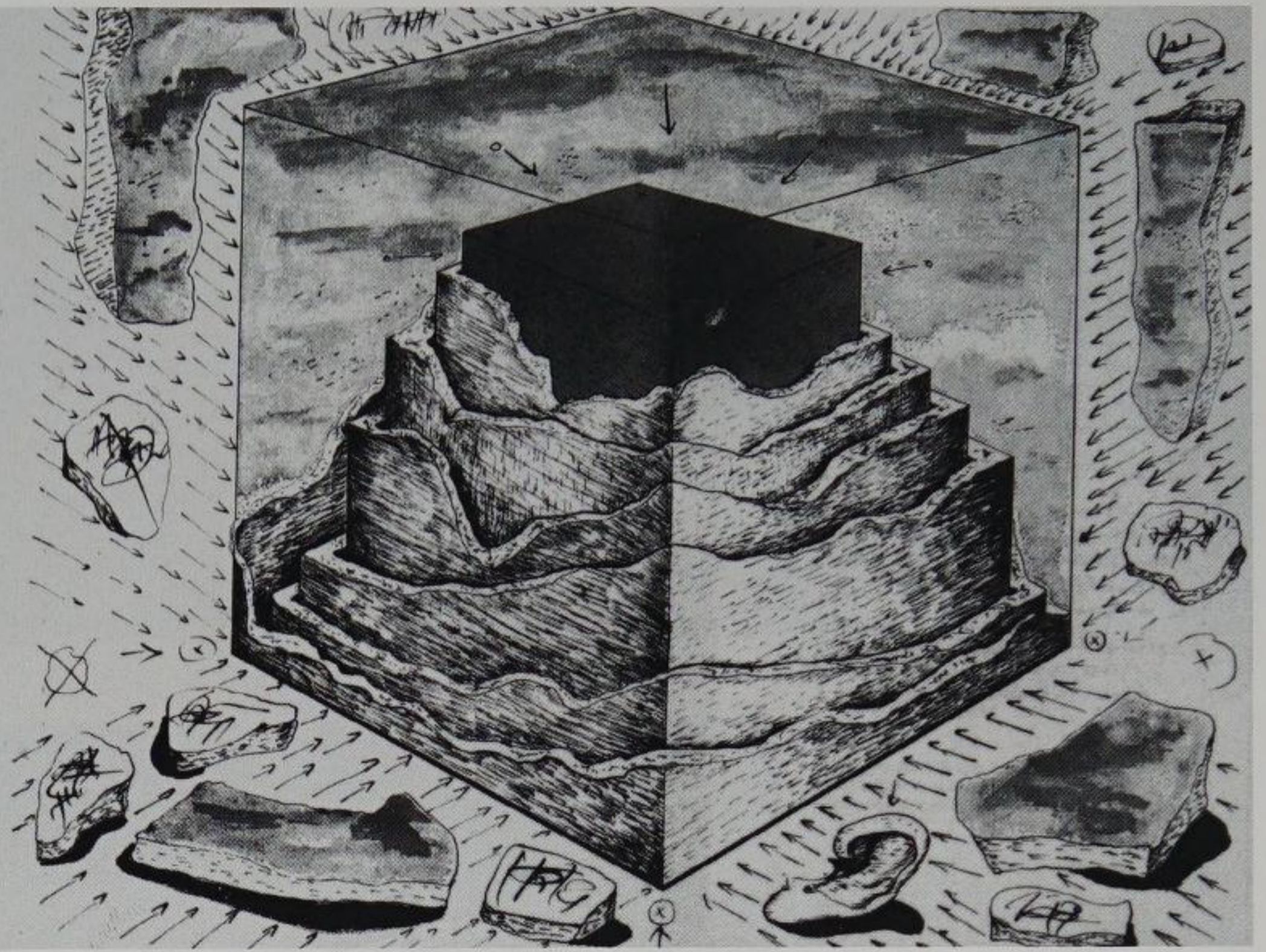
(Sex, Politics, Drugs, Art)

Nichita Stănescu

spunere

Ce bunăvoință e a glândi
cum fluturiele în zig-zag fluturind
Ce blindețe să și se pară că ești,
ce dulceață mi se pare profesiunea de călău,
aproape la fel ca dulceața de a fi moral.
Am văzut.
Am uitat.

116



This page clockwise from top:

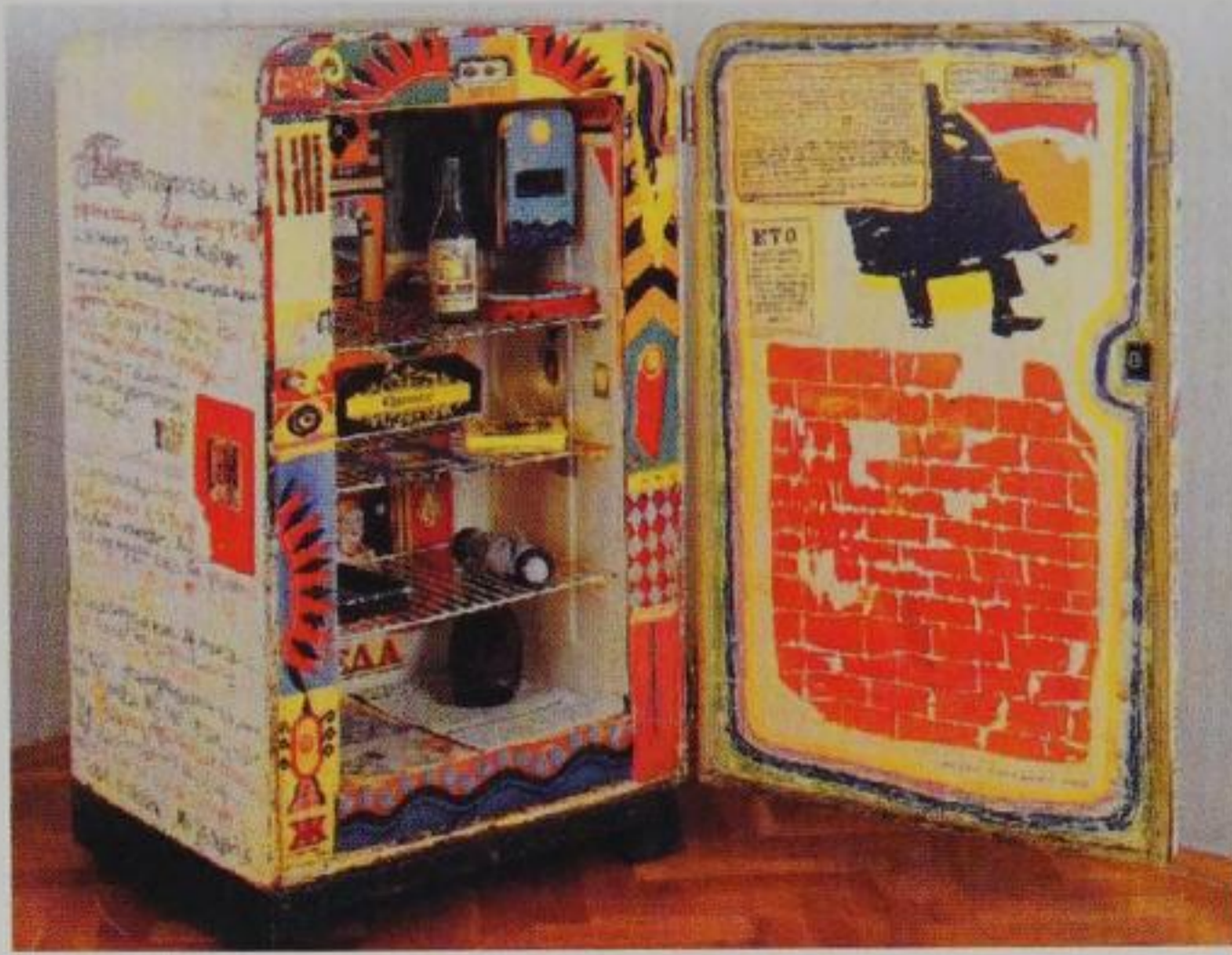
111. Sorin Dumitrescu (1946, Bucharest)
The Less Than Perfect Works
illustration of poems by Nichita Stănescu, 1980

112. Collective Actions (1979): Andrey Monastyrsky (1947, Petsame), Nikolaj Panitkov (1952, Vienna), Nikita Alexeev (1953, Moscow) and Georgi Kizevalter (1950, Moscow), later joined by Igor Makarevich (1943, Tbilisi), Elena Elagina (1948, Moscow), Sergej Romashko (1952, Moscow) and Sabine Hänsgen (1955, Düsseldorf)
Trips Out of the City, 1966 self-published volumes of documentation from the 1980s

Opposite page:

110. Neša Paripović (1942, Belgrade)
Poster-Messages
silkscreen, 1979

113. Boris Mikhailov (1938, Kharkov)
Unfinished Dissertation
photographs, 180 pages, 21 x 30 cm each, 1984

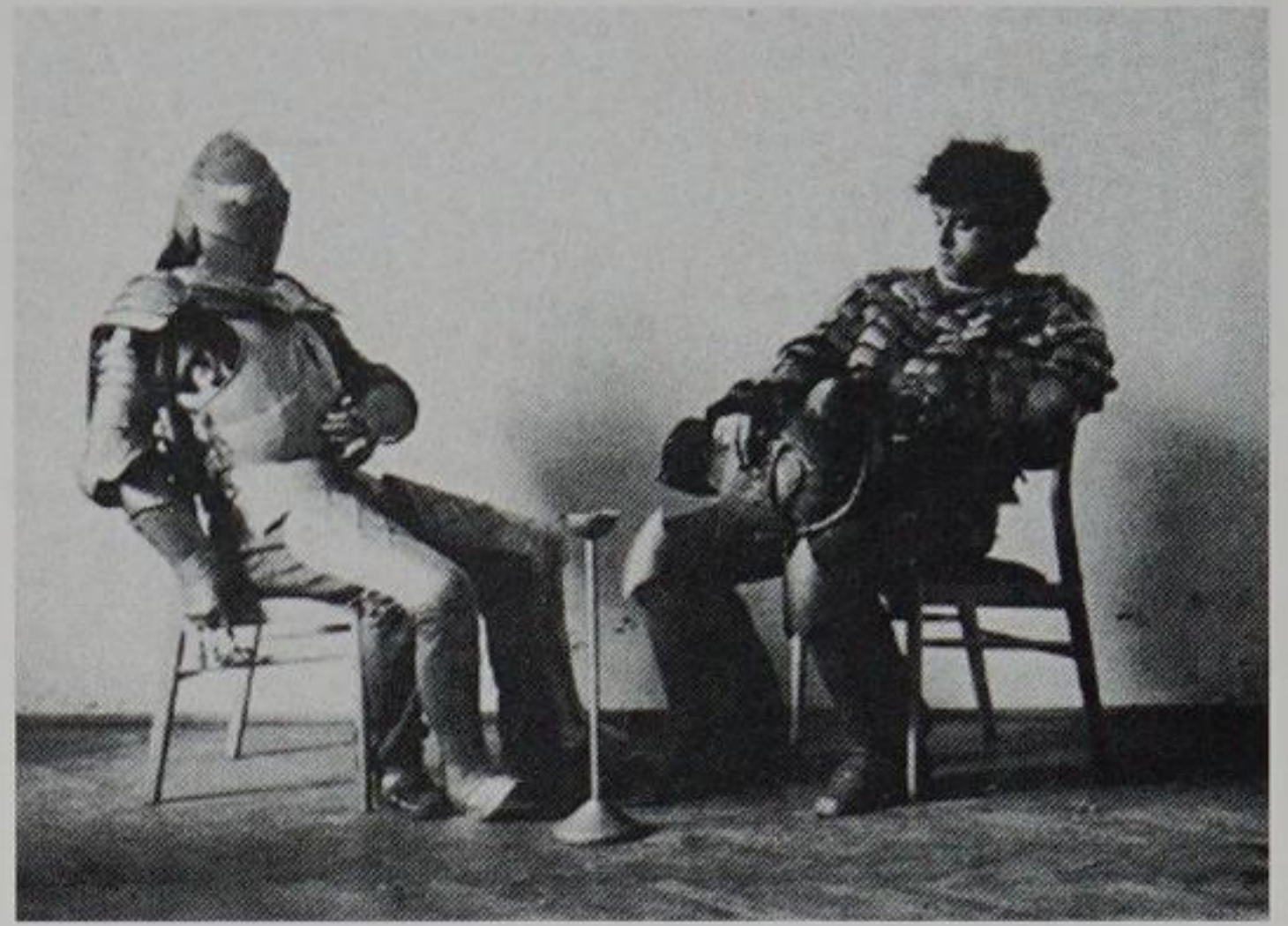
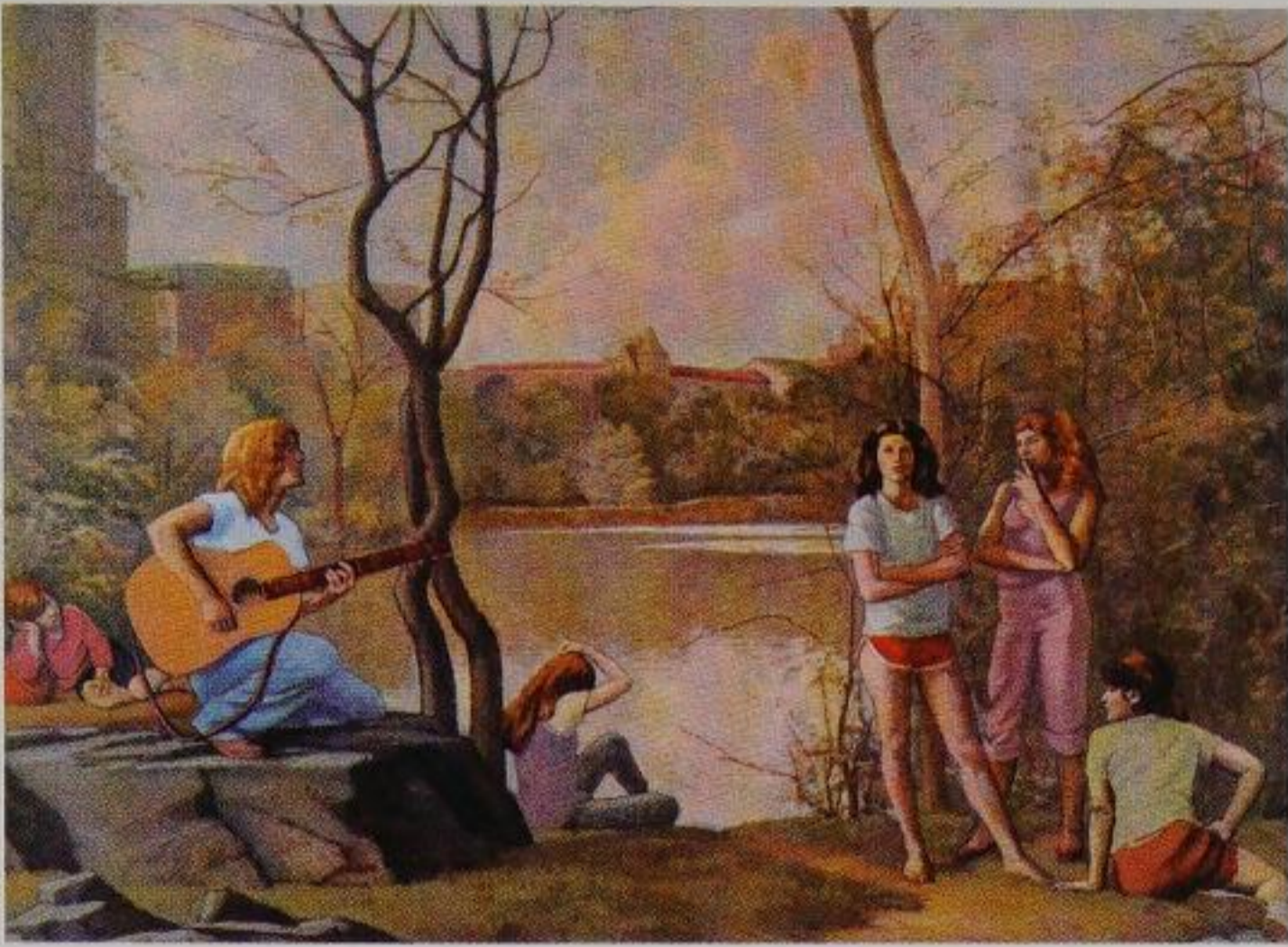


Clockwise from top left:

114. **Konstantin Zvezdochetov** (1958, Moscow)
Novel-Refrigerator
 object, 103 × 30 × 51 cm, 1982,
 State Tretyakov Gallery,
 Moscow

115. **Dmitri Prigov**
 (1940, Moscow)
 performances, 1980s–1990s

116. **Lutz Dammbeck**
 (1948, Leipzig)
Hercules
 media collage, dimensions
 variable, Dessau, 1982/83



Clockwise from top left:

117. Mileta Andrejević (1925, Belgrade–1991, New York)
Apollo and Daphne
egg, oil and tempera on canvas, 1981

118. András Böröcz (1956, Budapest), László L. Révész (1957, Budapest)
Jubilee
performance, 1982

119. APT-ART
series of events in private apartments, 1981
photograph of participants, 1982



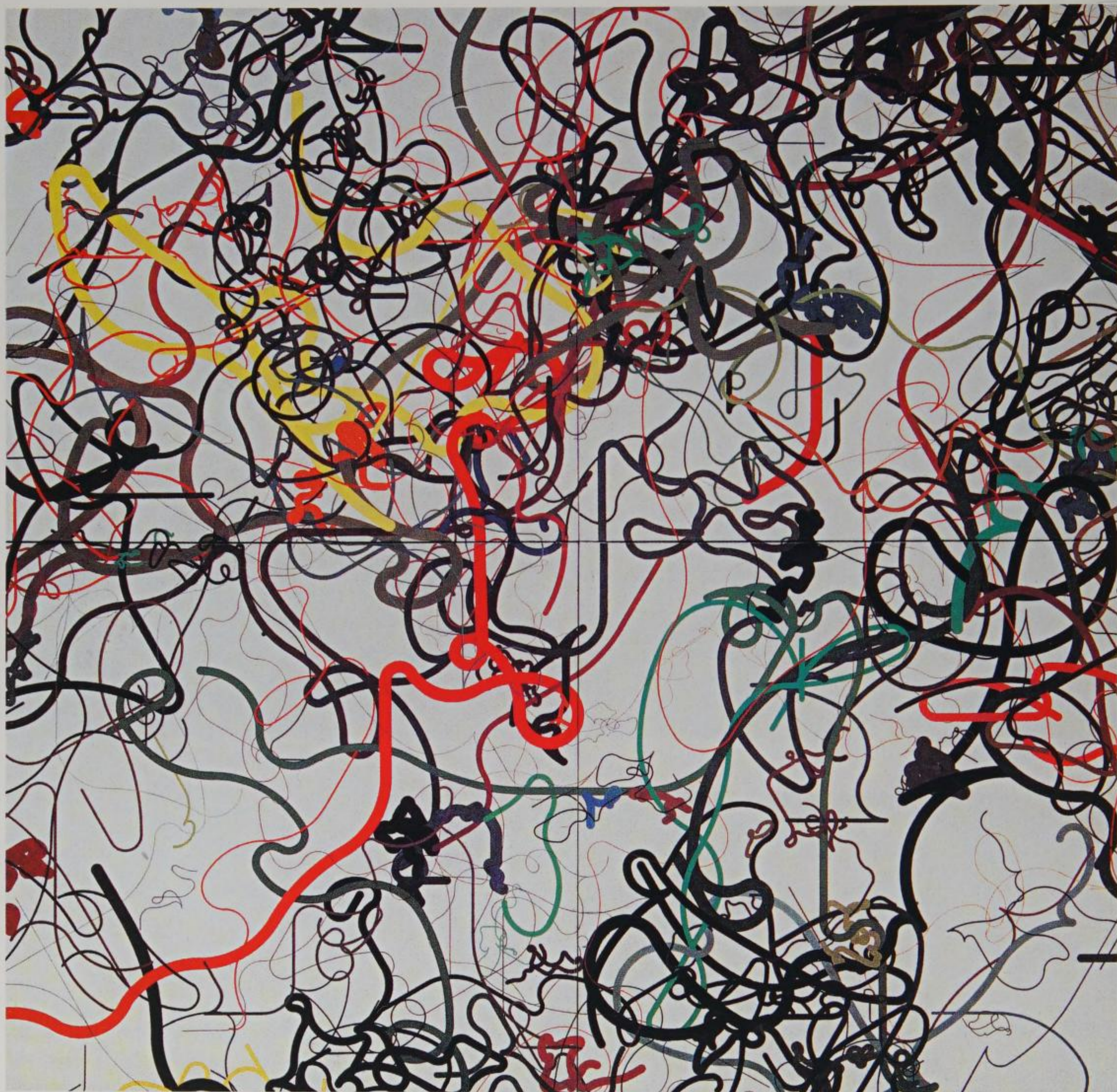
120. **New Artists (1982–1987):**
Timur Novikov
 (1958, Leningrad–2002,
 St. Petersburg), **Ivan**
Sotnikov (1961, Leningrad),
Oleg Kotelnikov,
Vlad Guzevitch, Georgy
Gurianov, Viktor Zoi
 and others
0 Object
 site specific intervention, 1982

121. **Tugo Šušnik**
 (1948, Ljubljana)
Tryptich
 acrylic on canvas,
 210 × 417 cm, 1980, Museum
 of Modern Art Ljubljana



122. Workshop for the Restoration of Non-Existent Feelings (1982–1989):
 Hardijs Ledins (1955, Riga),
 Juris Boiko (1954,
 Kuibishevka Vostochnaya)
Walk to Bolderaja
 annual action, Riga,
 1982–1987

123. Ștefan Bertalan
 (1930, Hunedoara)
The Myth of Life's Source
 happening, 1980



124. Zdeněk Sýkora
(1920, Louny)
Line No 24 / Last Judgement
oil on canvas, 300 × 300 cm,
in 4 parts, 1983–1984



125. The International
Exhibition of Modern Art,
Armory show in Belgrade
installation, 1985

126. Wolfgang Mattheuer
(1927, Reichenbach)
The Step of the Century
painted bronze,
265 × 90 × 230 cm, 1984/5

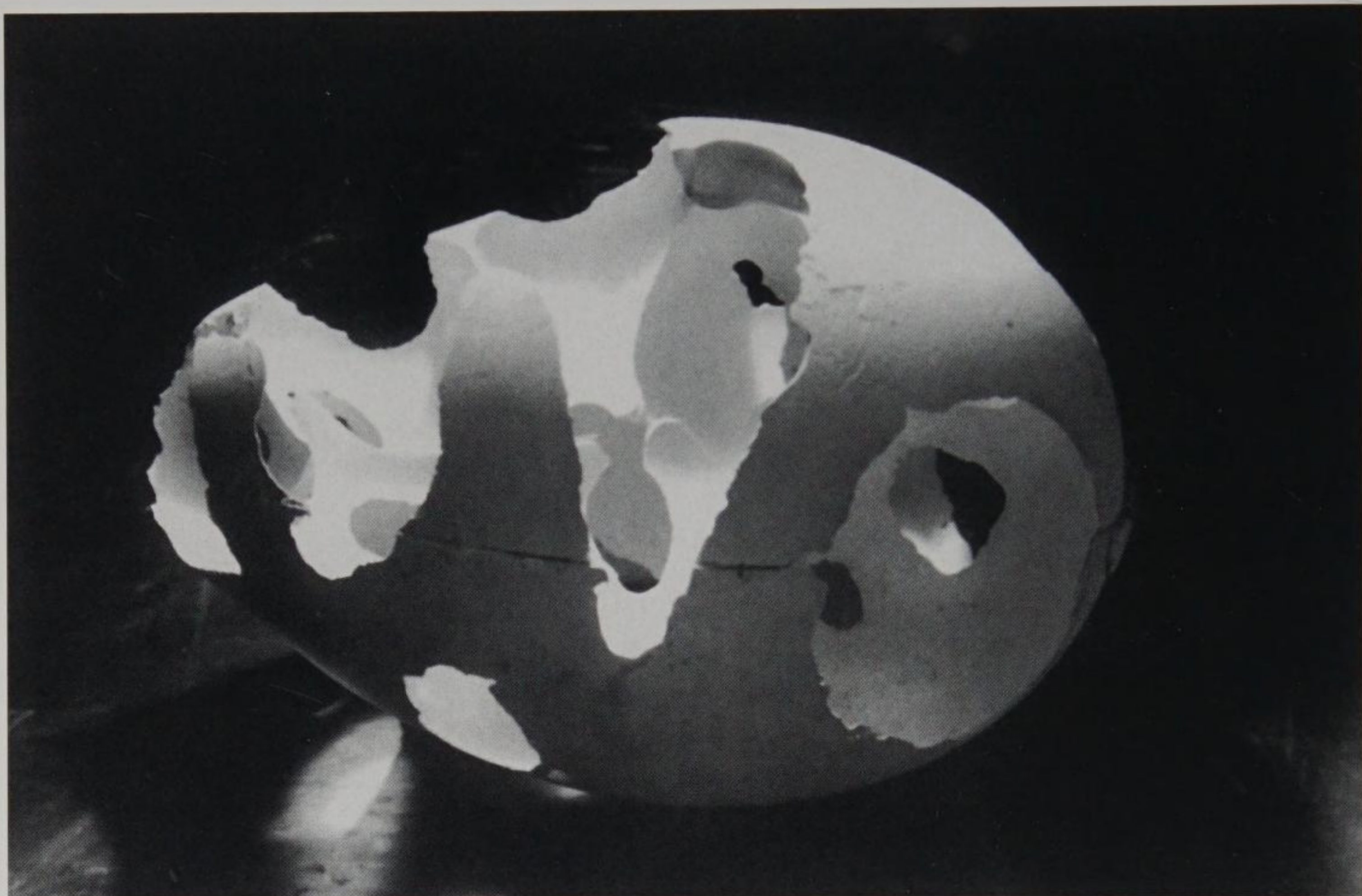


127. János Sugár
(1958, Budapest)
Fastculture 84
performance (from left to
right: T. Sebeö, P. Lekov,
J. Sugár), 1984–88



128. Laibach (1980, Trbovlje)
Laibach Interview
video still, 1983

129. Kasimir Malevich
(Belgrade, 1986)
Fiction Reconstructed
1986–2001

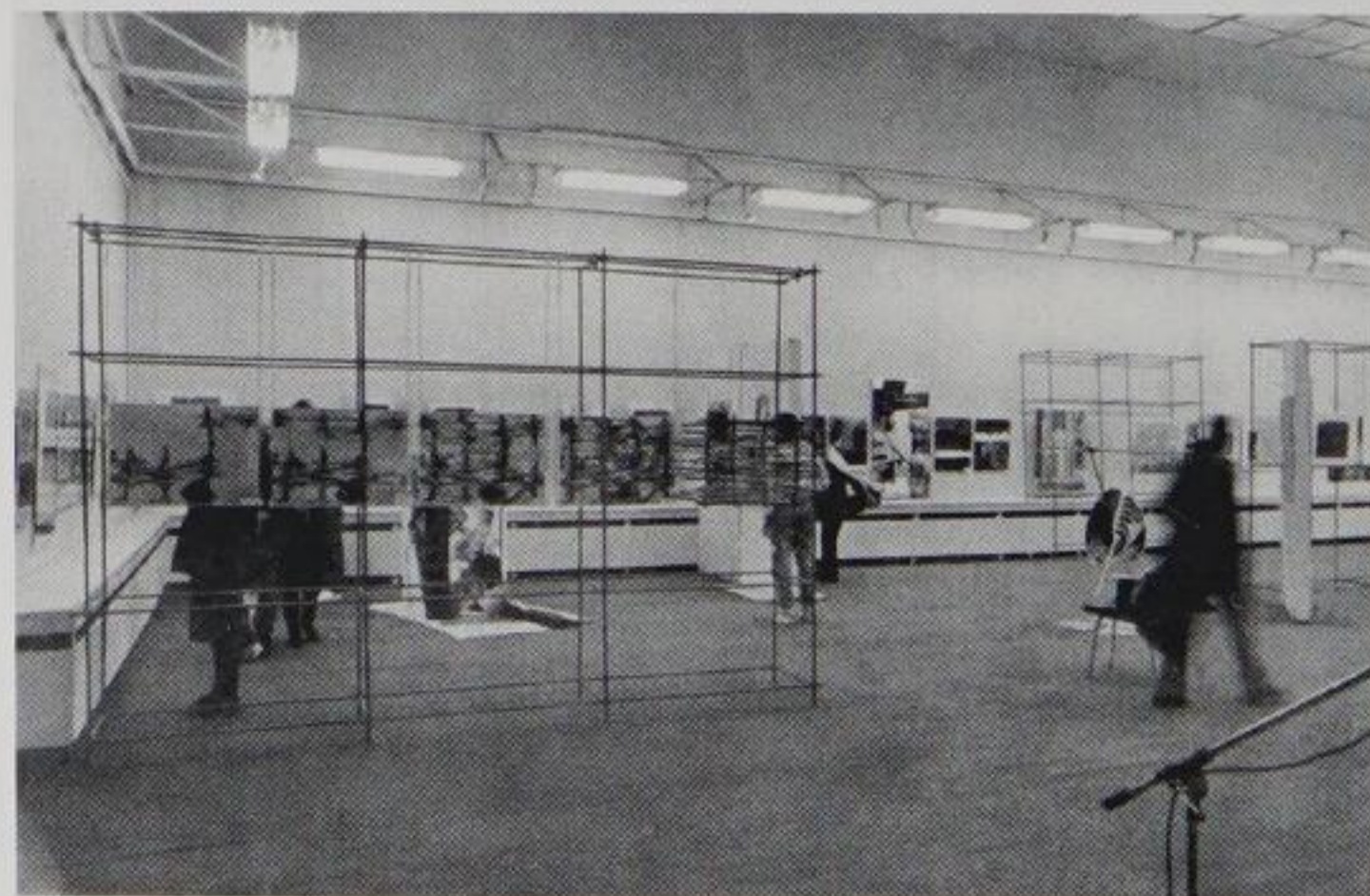


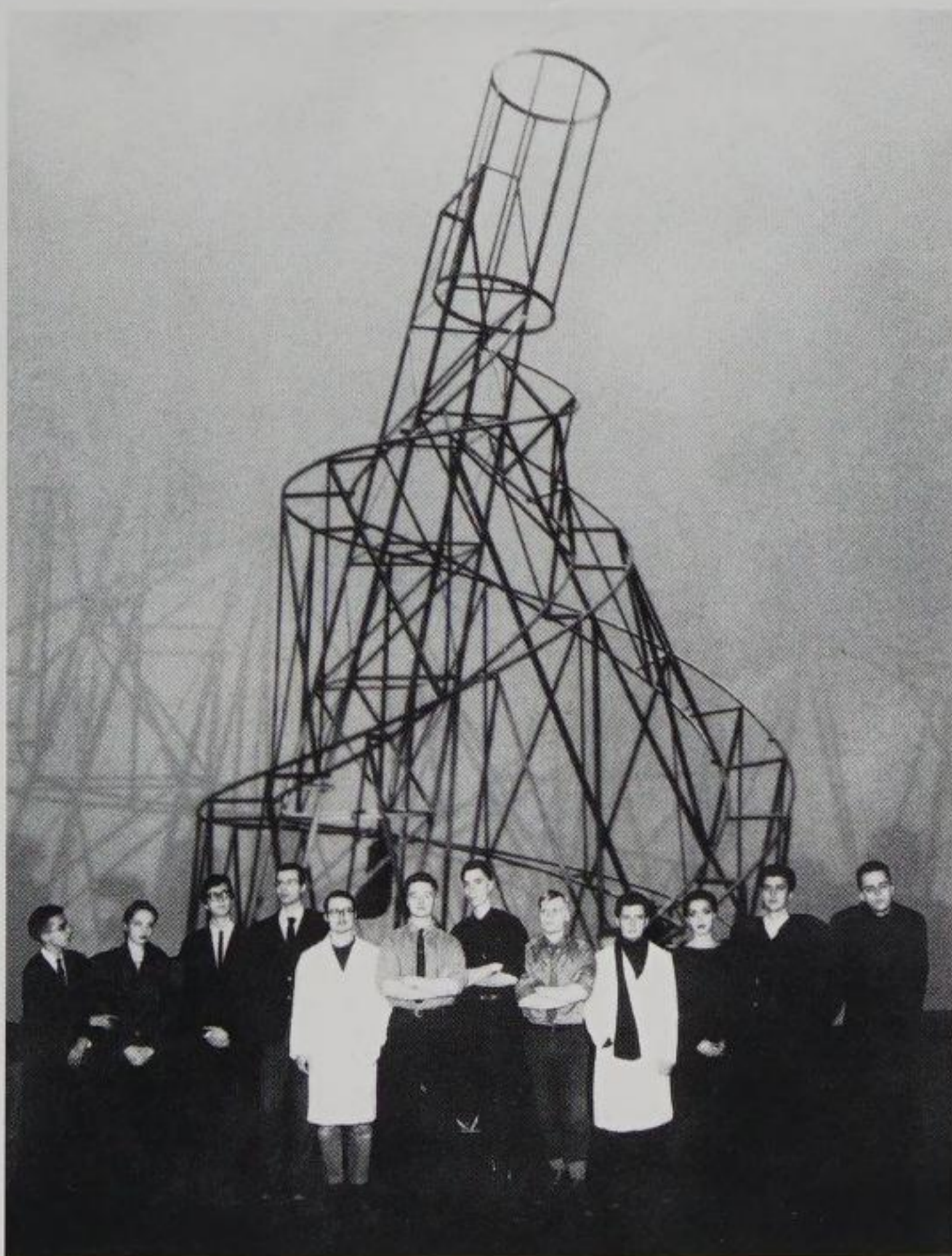
Clockwise from top:

130. **Mária Bartuszová**
(1936, Prague–1996, Košice)
Untitled
plaster, H 28 cm, 1986

131. **Kiril Prashkov** (1956,
Sofia), **Zlati Velez** (1954,
Sofia–1997, Veliko Tuarnovo)
Drawings and Woodcarvings
Exhibition
Sofia, 1986, photograph
by Boris Andreev and
Iara Boubnova

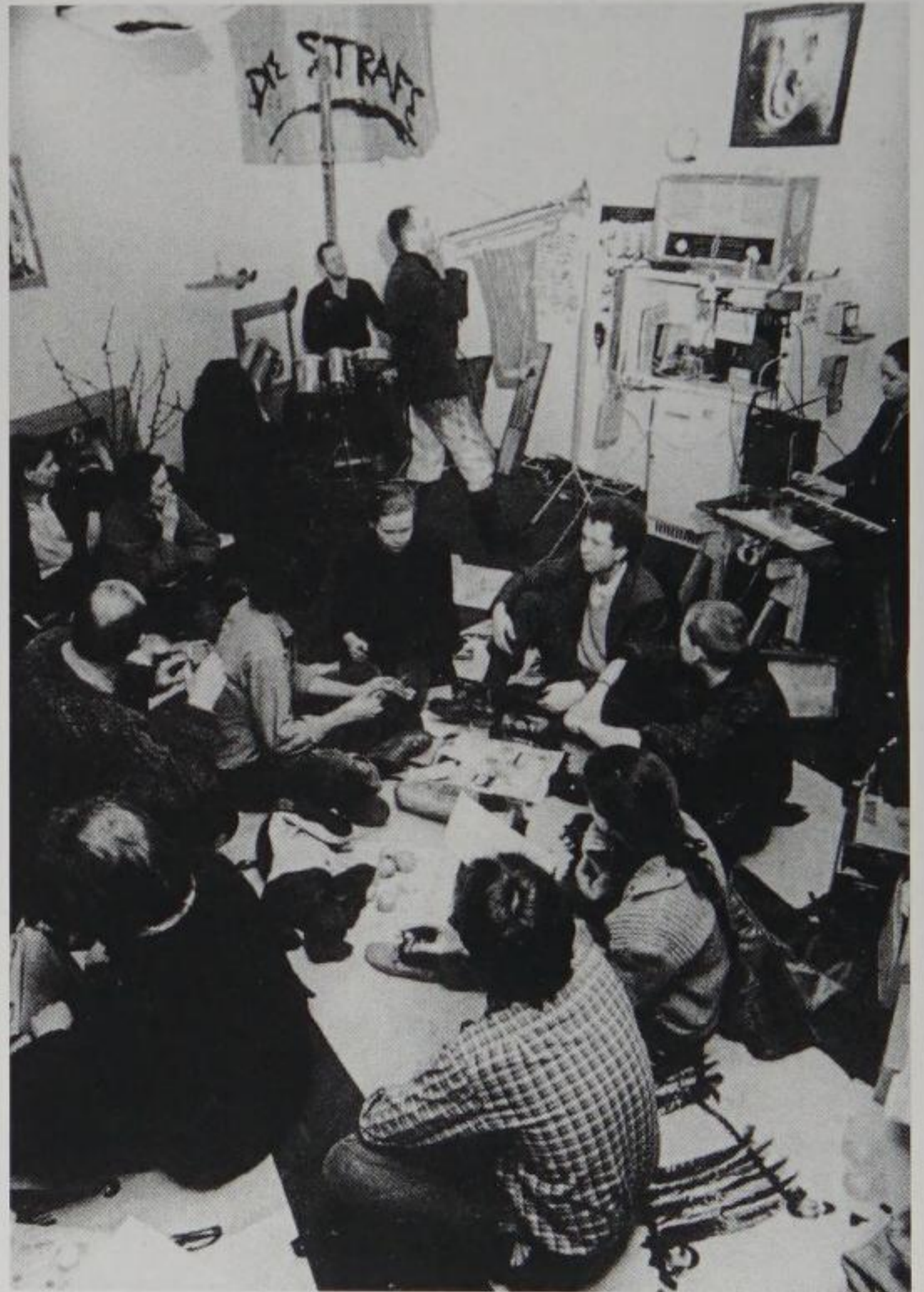
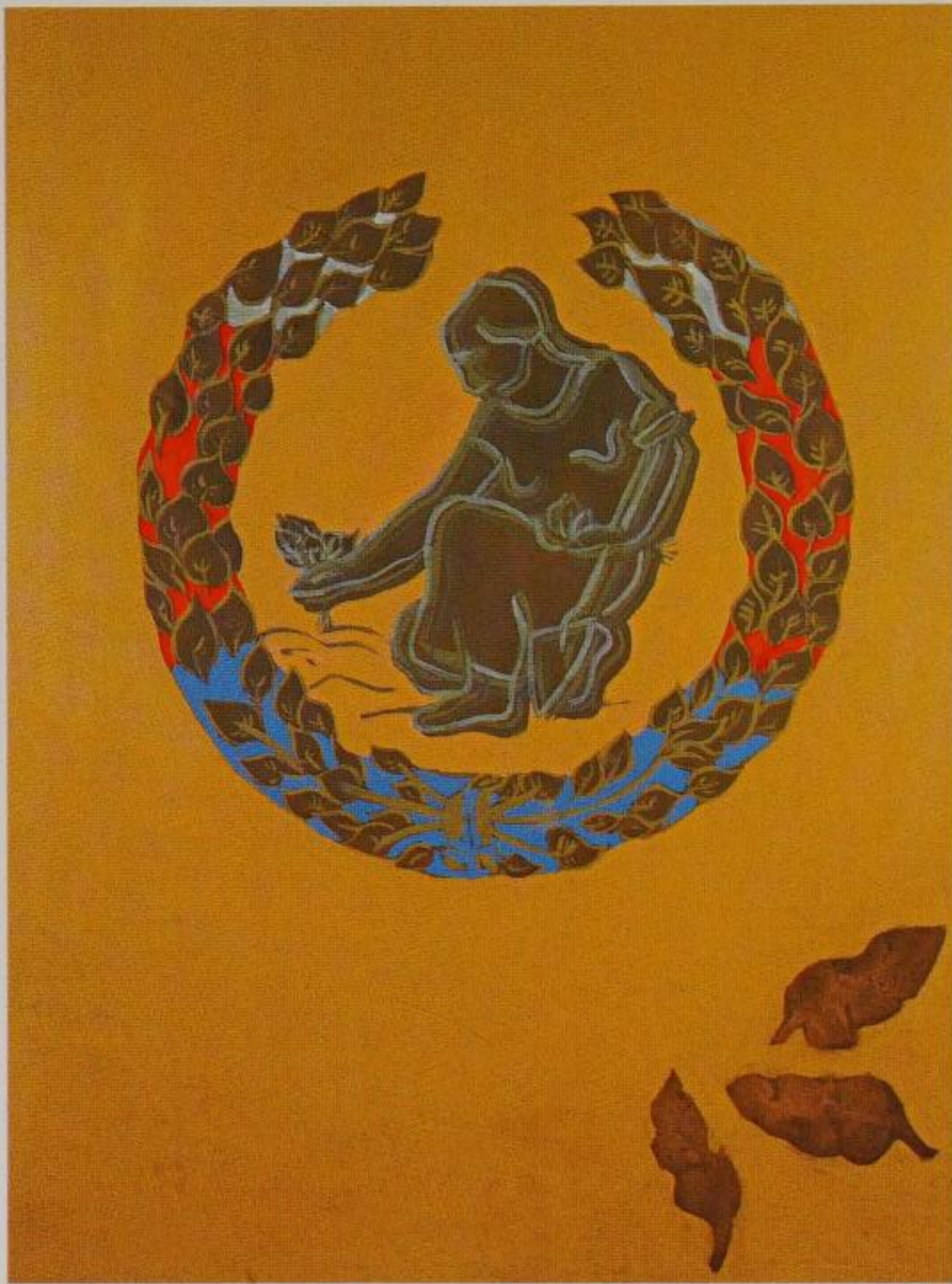
132. **E/A Show**
View of the Exhibition
group exhibition, Sofia, 1987





133. Zvono/Bell (1982–1992):
 Biljana Gavranović (Gornji
 Orlovci, 1957), Sadko
 Hadžihasanović (Bihać, 1959),
 Sejo Čizmić (Nevesinje, 1958),
 Narcis Kantardžić (Derвента,
 1958), Aleksandar Saša Bukvić
 (Šabac, 1949), Kemal Hadžić
 (Ključ, 1947)
Sport and Art
 photograph, 1986

134. Neue Slowenische
 Kunst/NSK (1984, Ljubljana)
Group Portrait
 1986, photograph by
 Marko Modic

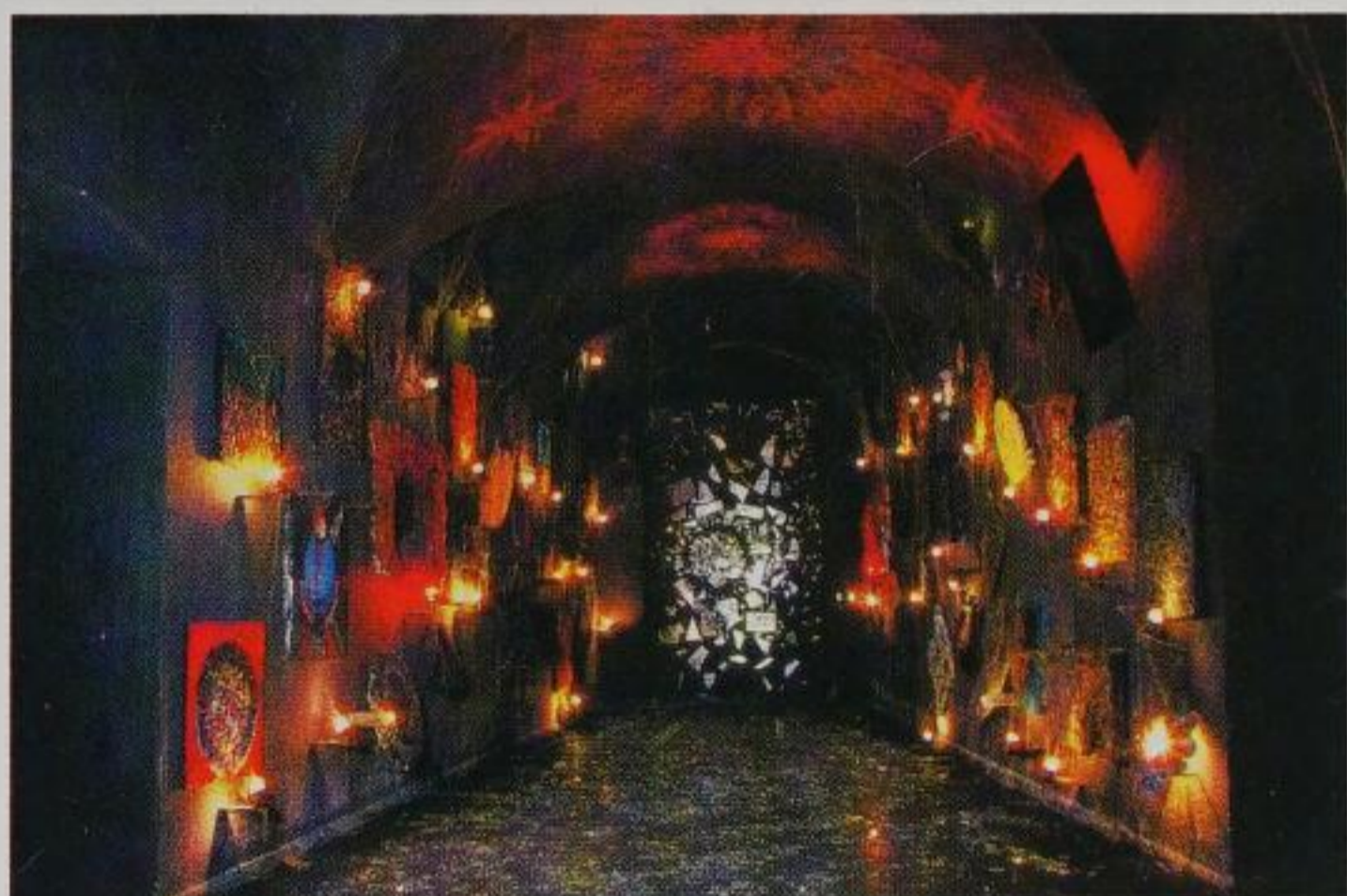
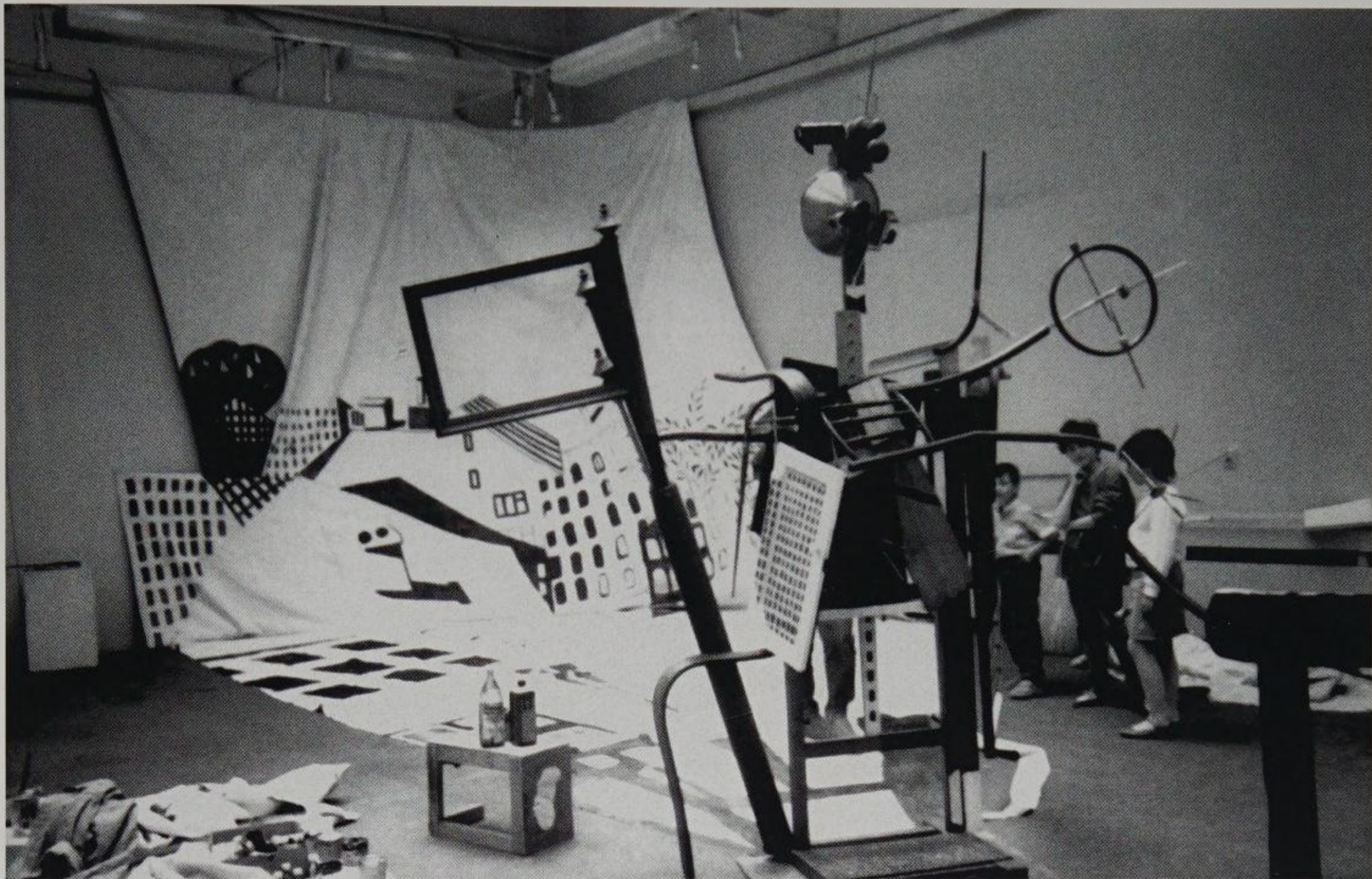


Clockwise from top left:

135. Jiří David
(1954, Rumburk)
Crown
acrylic on canvas,
210 × 150 cm, 1988

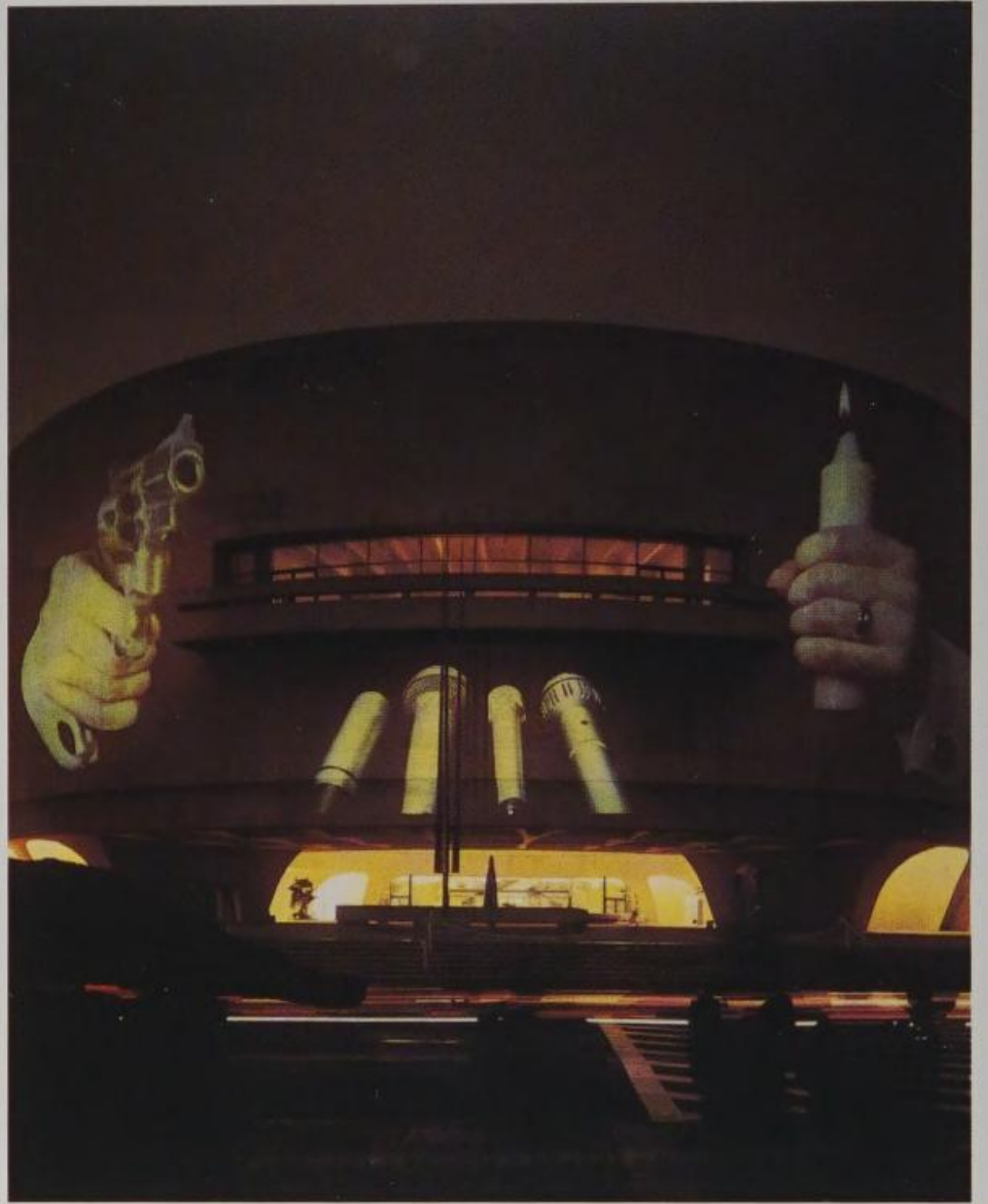
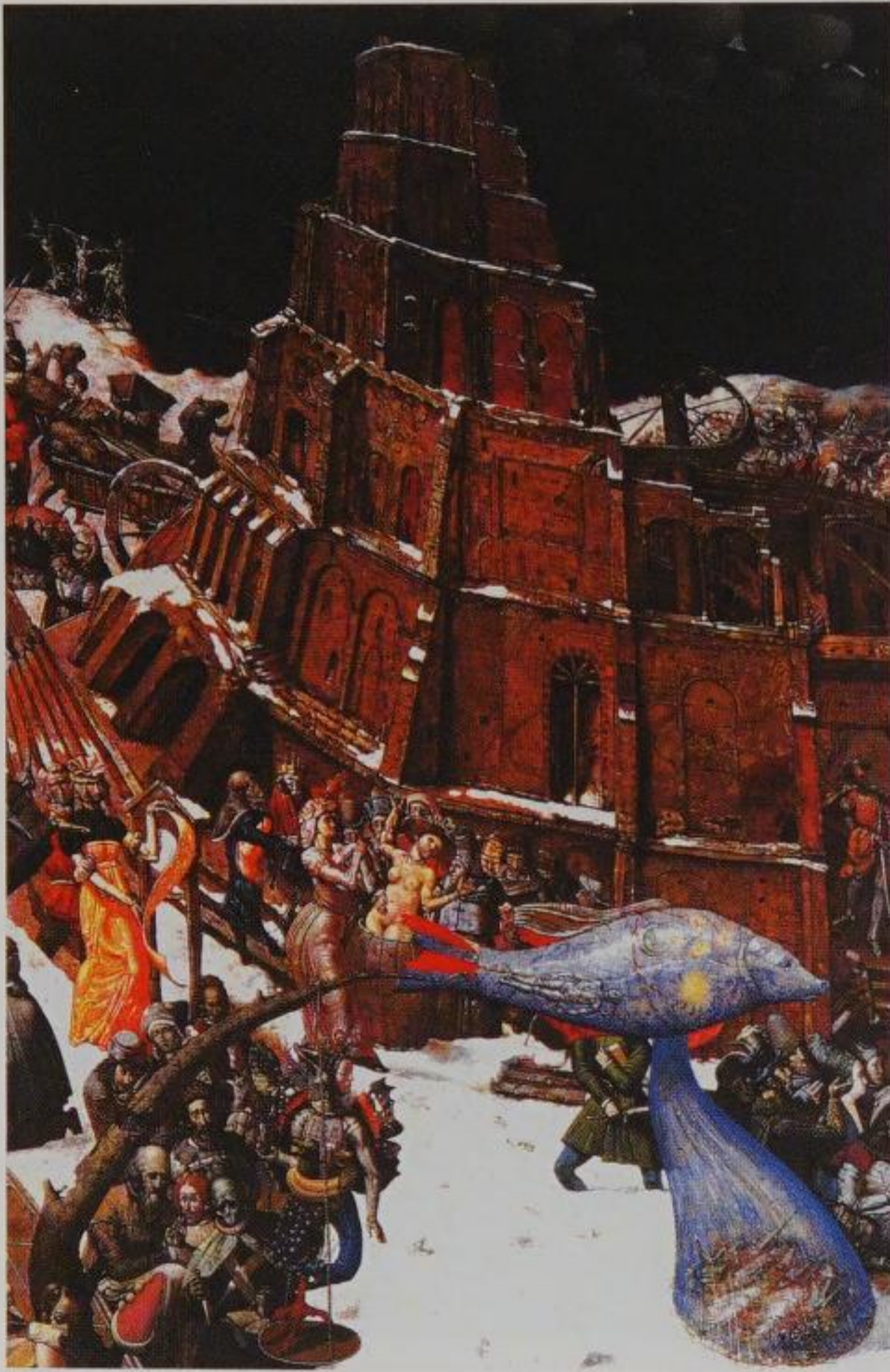
136. Via Lewandowsky
(1963, Dresden)
Did he die already?
acrylic on canvas with steel
spikes, 100 × 200 cm, 1988

137. Autoperforationsartisten
(1985–1991): Micha Brendel
(1959, Weida), Else Gabriel
(1962, Halberstadt),
Volker Via Lewandowsky
(1963, Dresden) and Rainer
Görß (1960, Neustrelitz),
Allez! Arrest!
11-day action: 27 March–
7 April 1988, photograph
Gallery Eigen + Art, Leipzig



138. *The City*
group exhibition, Sofia
installation view, 1988

139. *vssd Group /Veš, Slikar Svoj Dolg— (Painter Do You Know Your Duty) (1984–1995): Alen Ožbolt (1966, Ptuj), Janez Jordan (1967, Trbovlje) Space of a Painting*
mixed media, 5 × 4.4 × 8.2m,
1987, work destroyed



Clockwise from top left:

140. **Werner Tübke**
 (1929 Schönebeck/Elbe)
*The Early Civil Revolution
 in Germany* detail: *The Blue
 Fish at the Tower of Babel*
 monumental painting
 in Bad Frankenhausen,
 123 × 14m, started in 1976,
 completed in 1988

141. **Krzysztof Wodiczko**
 (1943, Warsaw)
Hirshorn Museum Projection
 light projection,
 Washington, 1988

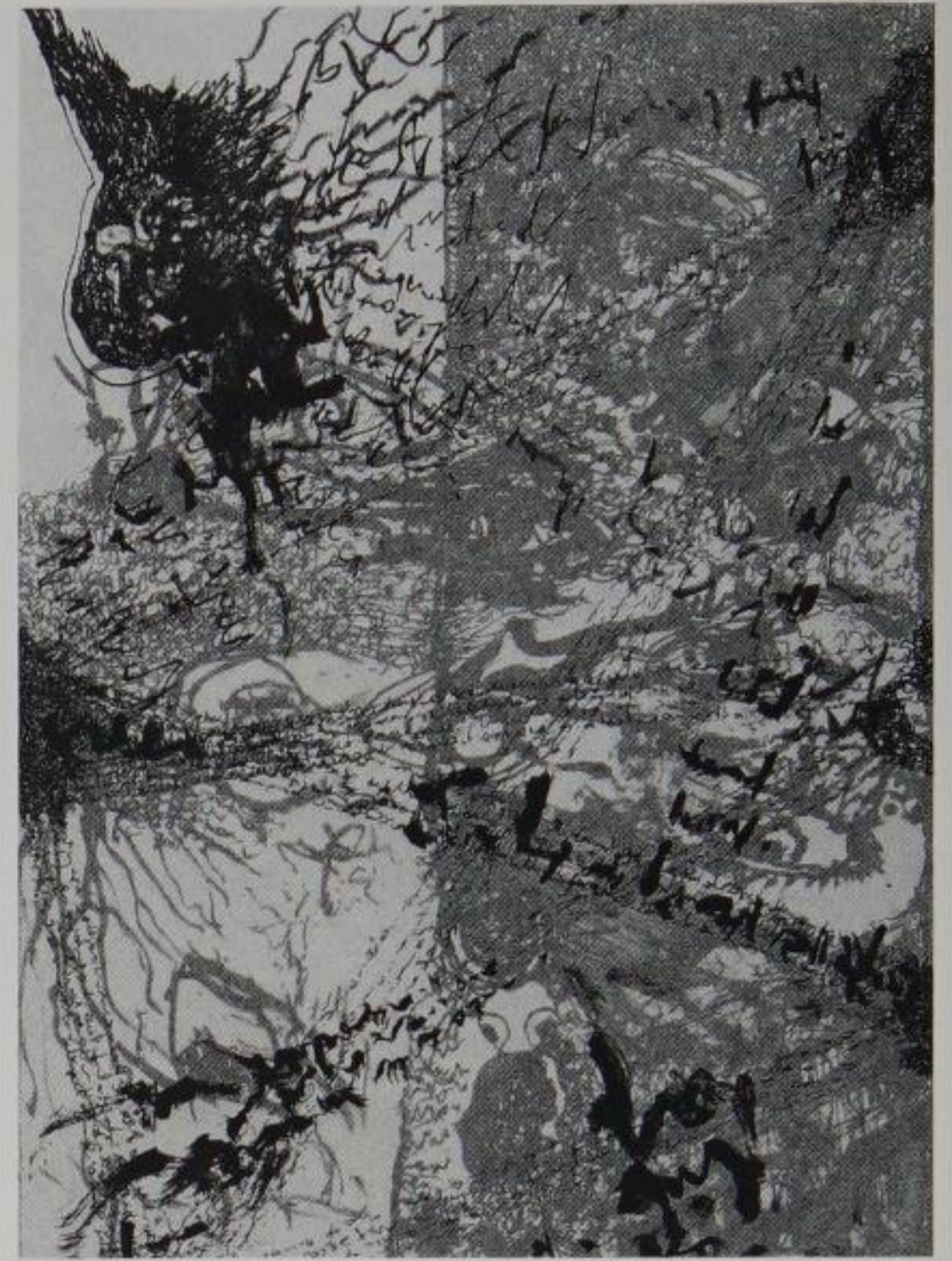
142. **Svetlin Roussev**
 (1933, Pleven)
Self-Portrait
 oil painting on canvas,
 200 × 200 cm, 1988,
 photograph by
 Nedialko Kristev





143. Luchezar Boyadjiev
(1957, Sofia)
Fortification of Faith
installation, 145 collages
and objects, 250 × 550 × 30 cm,
1989–1991, photograph by
Ilona Ripke and Nedko
Solakov, collection Hohenthal
und Bergen Galerie, Berlin

144. Lyuben Kostov
(1952, Pleven)
Downfall of the Article 1
action, domino blocks,
city square, Sofia, 1989
photograph by Lyuben Kostov

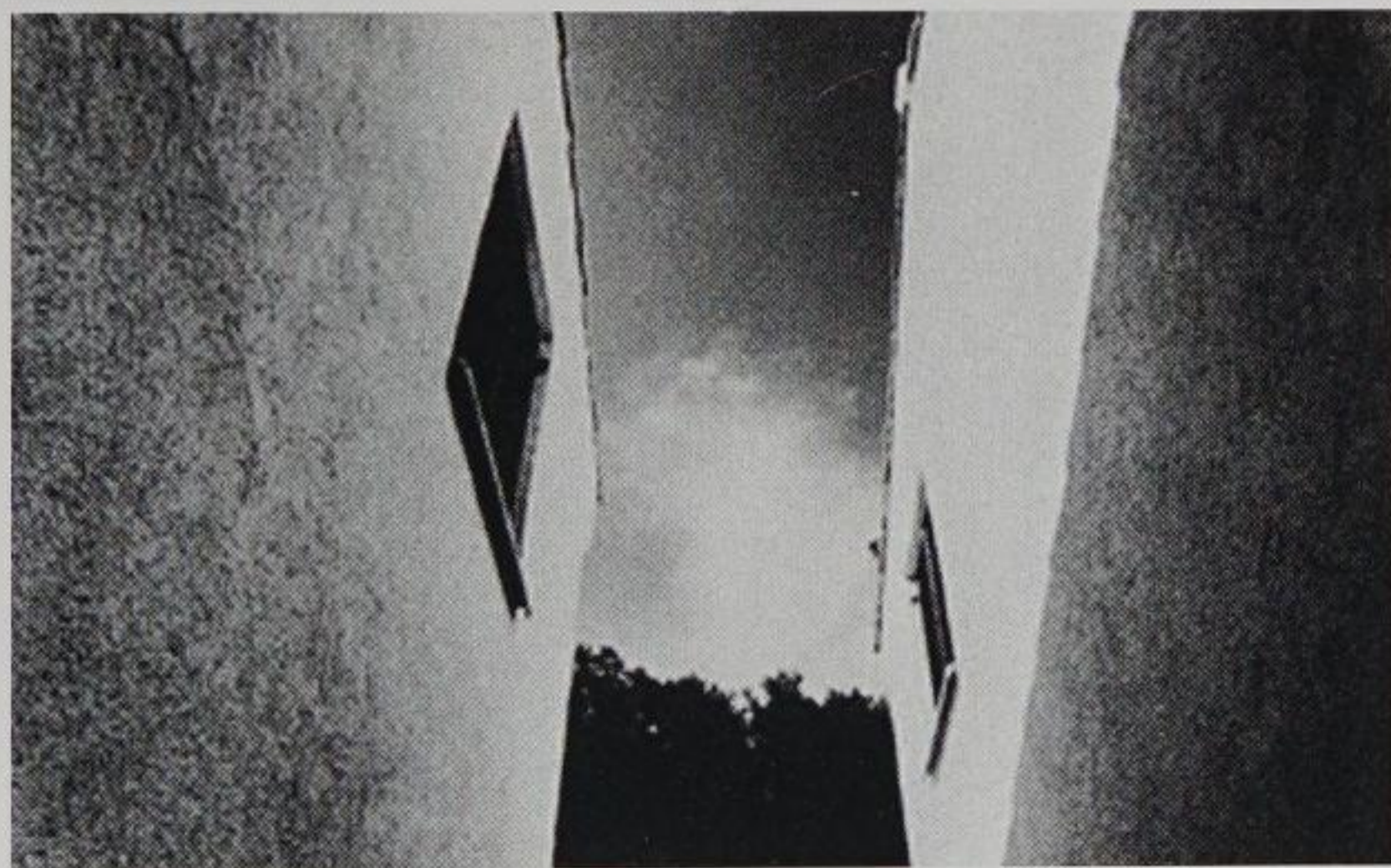


Clockwise from top left:

145. **Marian Zidaru**
(1956, Balotesti)
Commemoration
installation in the Village
Museum, Bucharest, 1988

146. **Carlfriedrich Claus**
(1930 Annaberg/
Erzgebirge–1998)
Change of Effect:
Talking Being Silent
(from the album *Dialogues*)
lithography, 53 × 40 cm,
1988/89

147. **Jusuf Hadžifejzović**
(1957, Sarajevo)
Arbeit Macht Frei
installation, 1989

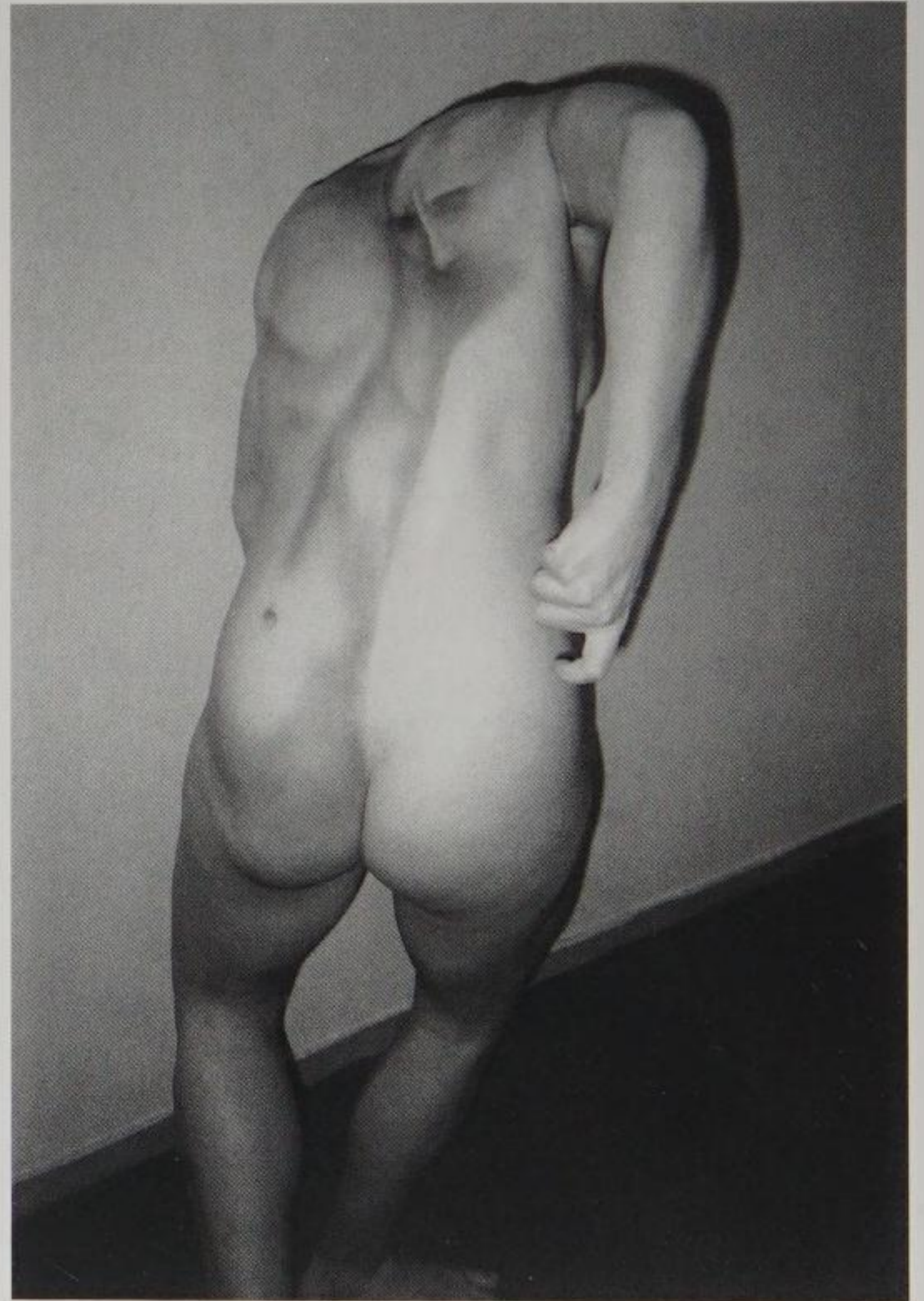
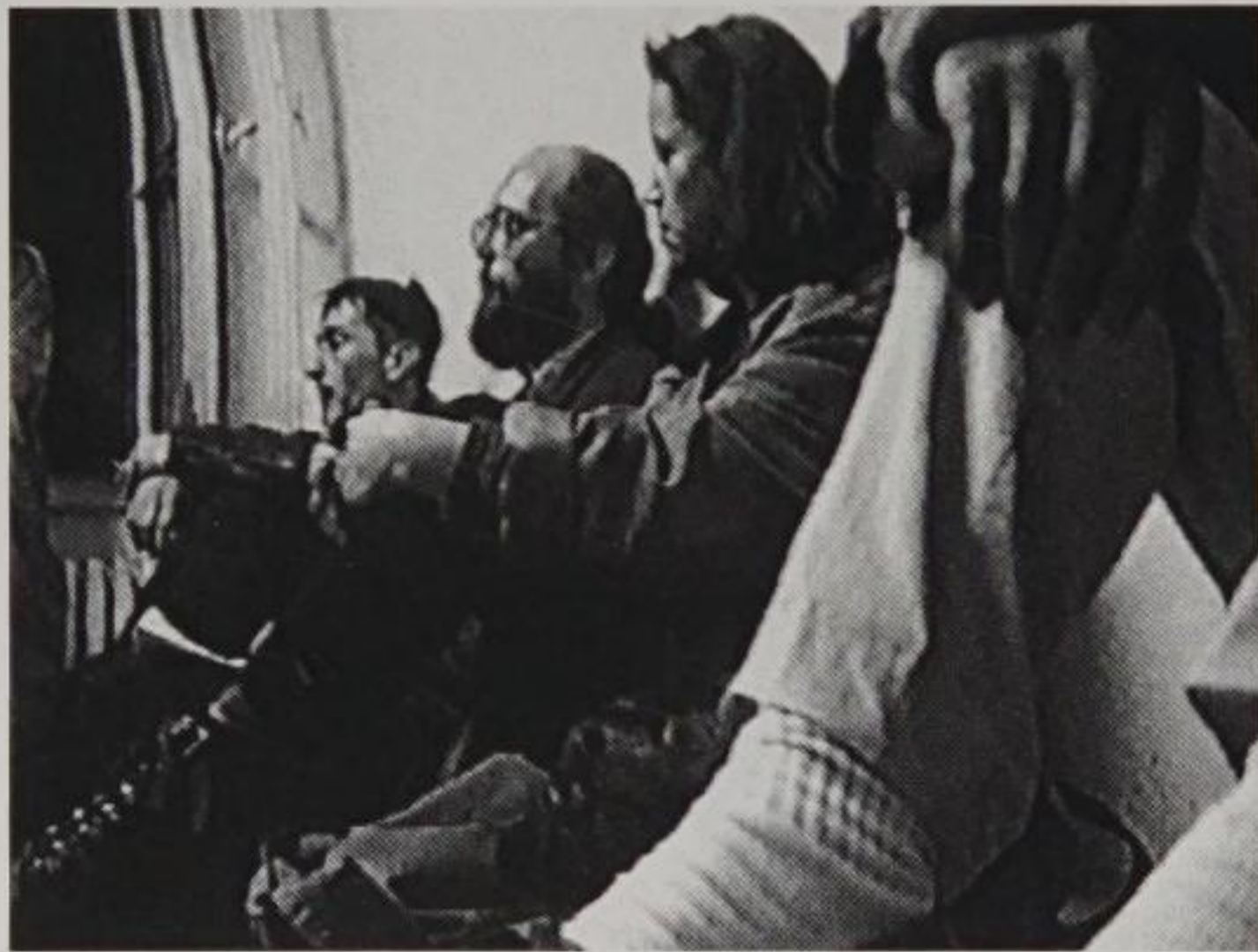
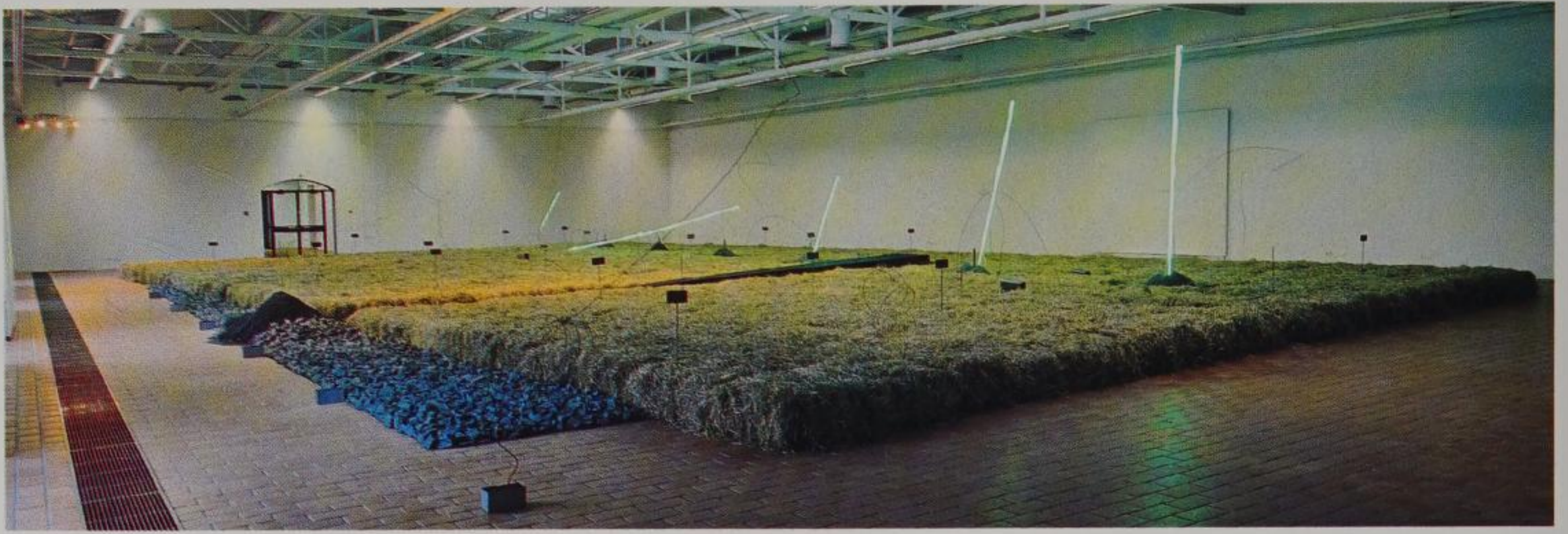


Clockwise from top left:

148. *I Love You, Life!*
Women's Group (1990–1992):
 Marina Alexeeva (1958,
 Leningrad), Marina
 Koldobskaya (1961,
 Leningrad), Marina Teplova
 (1963, Leningrad) and
Eugenia Kamenskaya
 (1958, Leningrad)
Nonna and Pasha
 installation, 1991

149. **Zero Group**
 (1980s–1993)
Painting a Street Mural,
 photograph, 1990

150. **Aldo Prpić/Svebor
 Krantz** (1967, Zagreb)
Untitled from the series
Zagreb Virus
 photograph, 1990



Clockwise from top left:

151. **Jüri Okas** (1950, Tallinn)
Installation 9
 exhibition detail in The Pori Art Museum, Finland, 1991,
 Pori Art Museum, Finland

152. **Wanda Mihuleac**
 (1946, Bucharest)
Cain, le bien-aimé
 performance, Paris, 1990

153. **Metelkova** (1991)
Metelkova
 documentary video, 1991,
 filmed by Mirko Simić



154. Nedko Solakov
(1957, Cherven Briag)
New Noah's Ark,
detail: *The Creatures*
installation, drawings,
painting, objects, wall text,
dimensions variable,
1991–1992

155. Aleksandar Stankovski
(1959, Kičevo)
The Last Supper in Gallery 7
photography and oil on panel,
205 × 275 cm, 1990



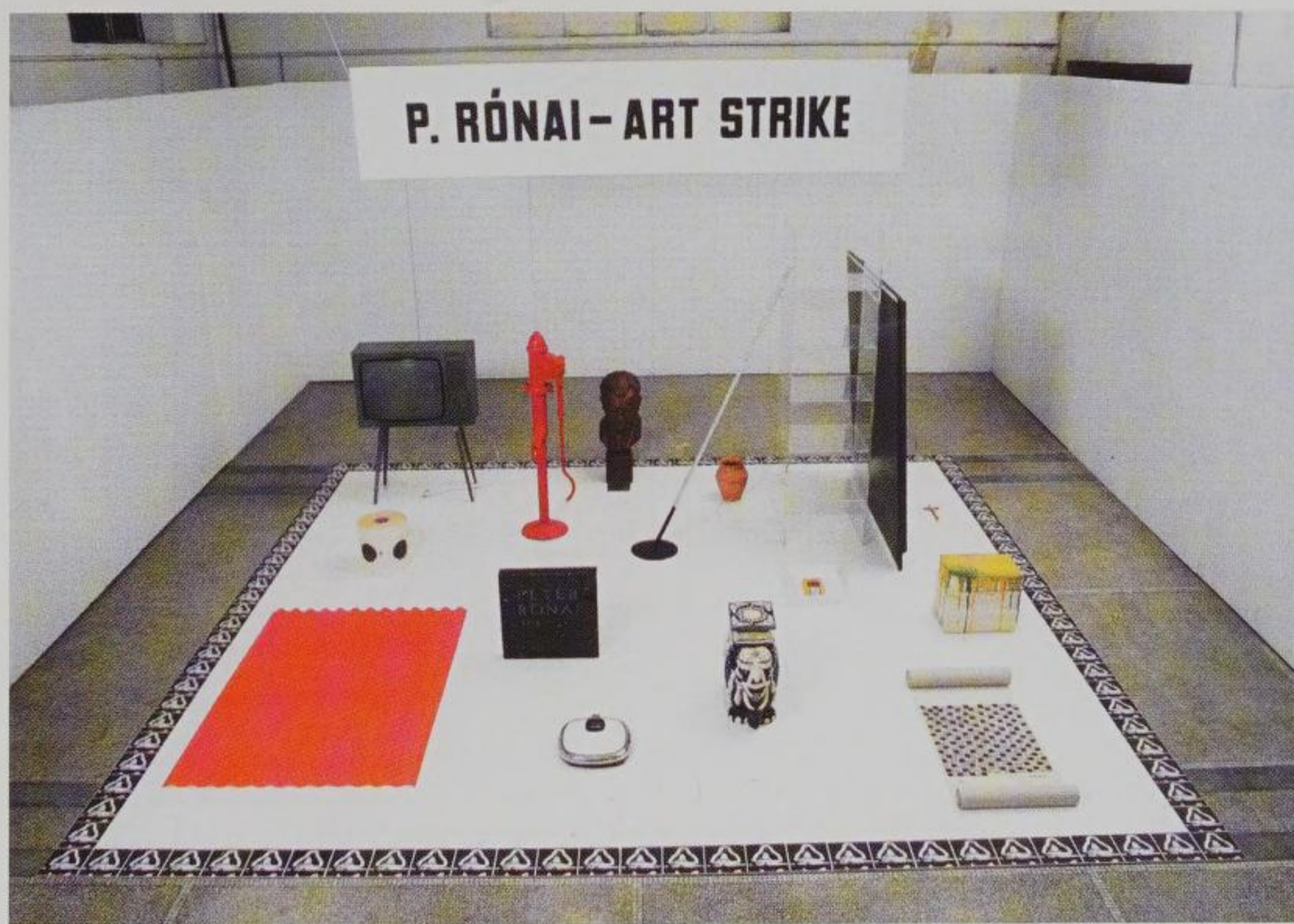
Clockwise from top left:

156. **Trio: Dalila Duraković** (1966, Sarajevo), **Bojan Hadžihalilović** (1964, Sarajevo), **Leila Mulabegović** (1966, Sarajevo, later left the group)
Coca Cola — Sarajevo
tempera on paper,
100 × 70 cm, 1993

157. **Bálint Szombathy** (1950, Paćir)
Flags II
performance, 1993

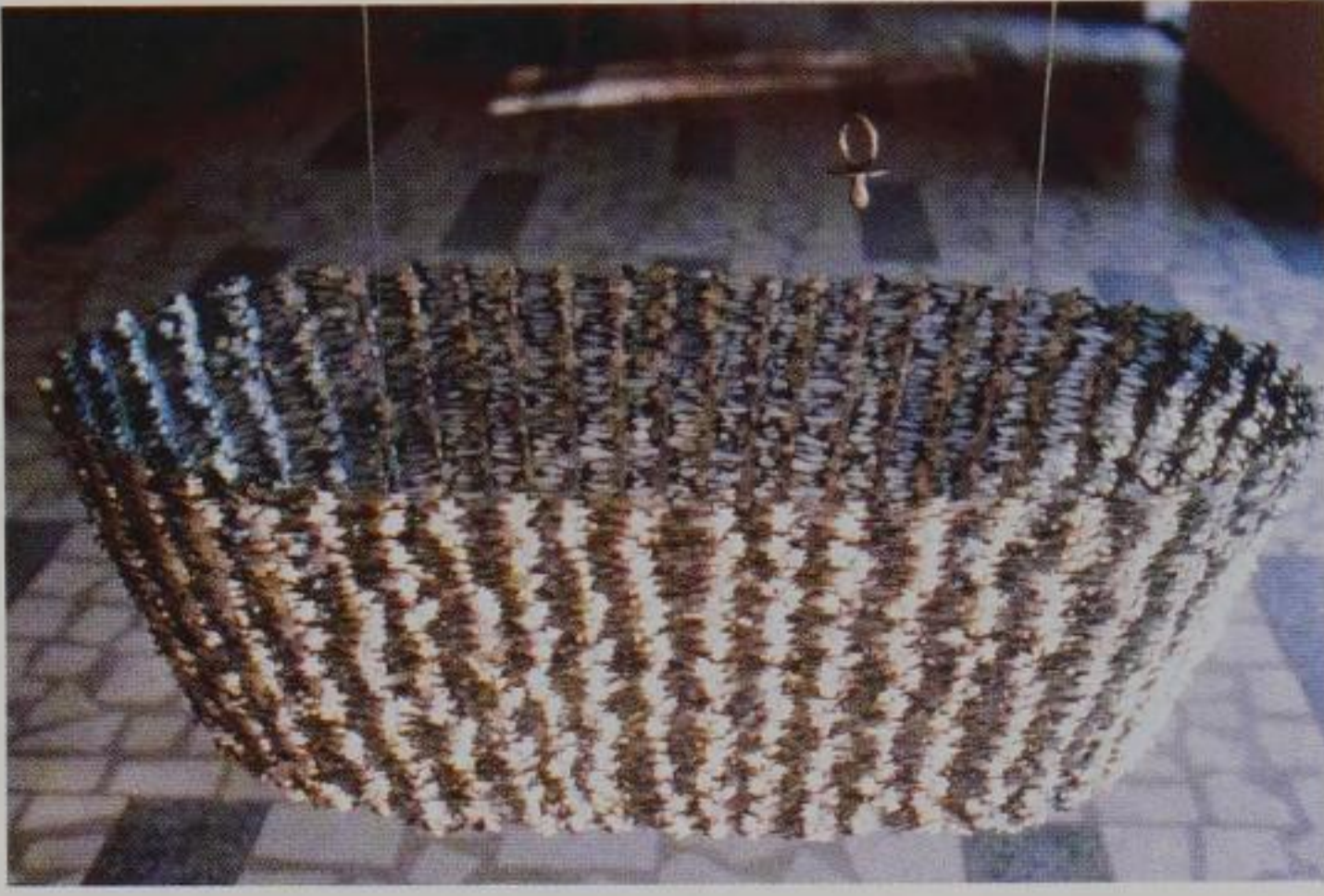
158. **Tamás St. Auby/ Szentjóby** (1944, Fót)
The Statue of Liberty's Soul
intervention, 1992





159. IRWIN (1983):
 Dušan Mandič (1954,
 Ljubljana), Miran Mohar
 (1958, Novo Mesto), Andrej
 Savski (1961, Ljubljana),
 Roman Uranjek (1961,
 Trbovlje), Borut Vogeljik
 (1959, Radovljica)
Black Square on Red Square
 in collaboration with
Kinetikon Pictures, event
 on the occasion of the
NSK Embassy Moscow, 1992,
 photograph by
 Kinetikon Pictures

160. Peter Rónai
 (1953, Budapest)
Message Saloon
 installation, mixed media,
 1992



This page clockwise
from top left:

161. **Artūras Raila**
(1962, Rainaičiai)
The Cradle Guaranteeing a Pragmatic Infantility
barbed wire, turned steel, 1994

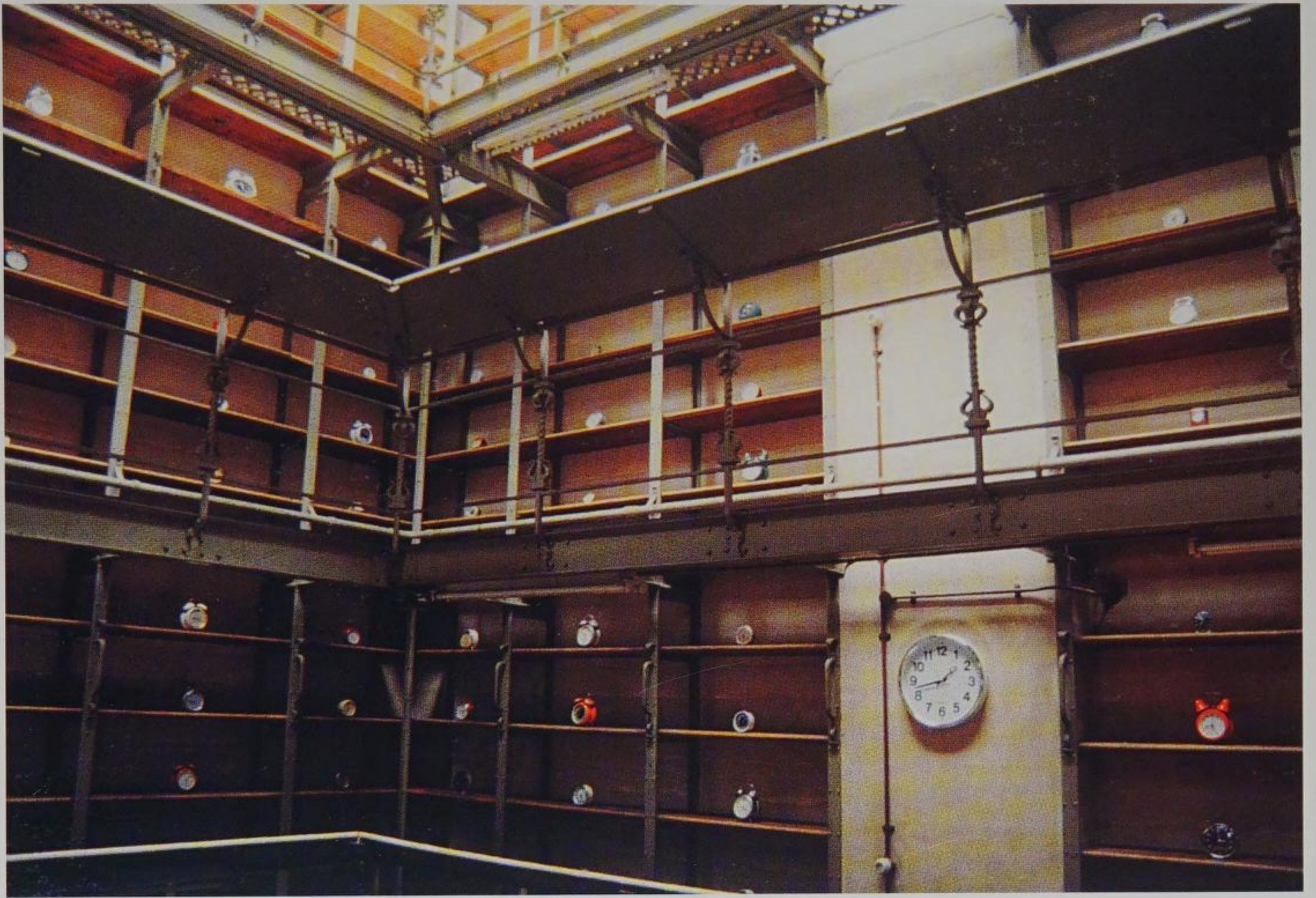
162. **Mindaugas Navakas**
(1952, Kaunas)
Hook
sheet steel, 500 × 300 × 110 cm,
1994

163. **Aneta Svetieva**
(1944, Bitola)
Turkish Bath
installation, red metal wire
net, cardboard, plaster, neon
light, TV monitor, Museum
of the City of Skopje, 1994,
photograph by Žaneta Vangeli

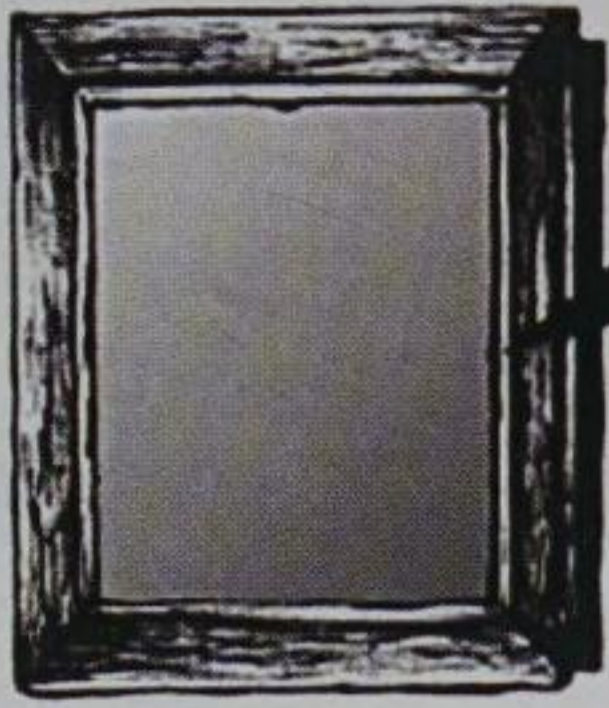
Opposite page:

164. **Jarosław Kozłowski**
(1945, Poznań)
Personal Files
installation, 1993, Archief
Gallery, The Hague

165. **Ilya Kabakov**
(1933, Dnepropetrovsk),
Vladimir Tarasov
(1947, Arkhangelsk)
*Incident at the Museum
or Water Music*
mixed media installation, 1993



SPIEGEL



Spiegel



БИТЬ ИКОНОЙ ПО ЗЕРКАЛУ

IKONE



Икона

Du bist – Zer. Lebte allein. Dein Weg ist frei
Geh, wohin dein Geist dich führt...
A. S. Puschkin

Der Kontakt des Paradigmas «Westen» und «Russland» wird verkörpert in der Gedankenform eines Zusammenbaus von Ikone und Spiegel. Der Spiegel («Westen») spiegelt den Querschnitt der Ikone, das heißt er rahmt deren Gegenständlichkeit ein. Die Ikone jedoch, in der Ecke aufgehängt, kann mit ihrer schweren Metalleinfassung den Spiegel zerschlagen. Im Fall eines (ökumenischen) «Wunders» tritt die Ikone wie «Alice through the Looking-Glass» in ihr eigenes Spiegelbild.
In einer anderen Version kann der Spiegel sich im Moment des Schlags in einen negativen Terminator 2 verwandeln, in ein Soreplasma, das mit dem Glaspiegel in eine unvorhersagbare Beziehung tritt. Im Übrigen spiegelt sich der Text auf natürliche Weise in den Illustrationen.

DIE IKONE GEGEN DEN SPIEGEL SCHLAGEN

166. Medical Hermeneutics
(1989): Pavel Pepperstein
(1964, Moscow) and Sergey
Anufriev (1961, Odessa) with
Yuri Leiderman, who later
left the group
*To Break the Mirror
with an Icon*
installation project, 1993

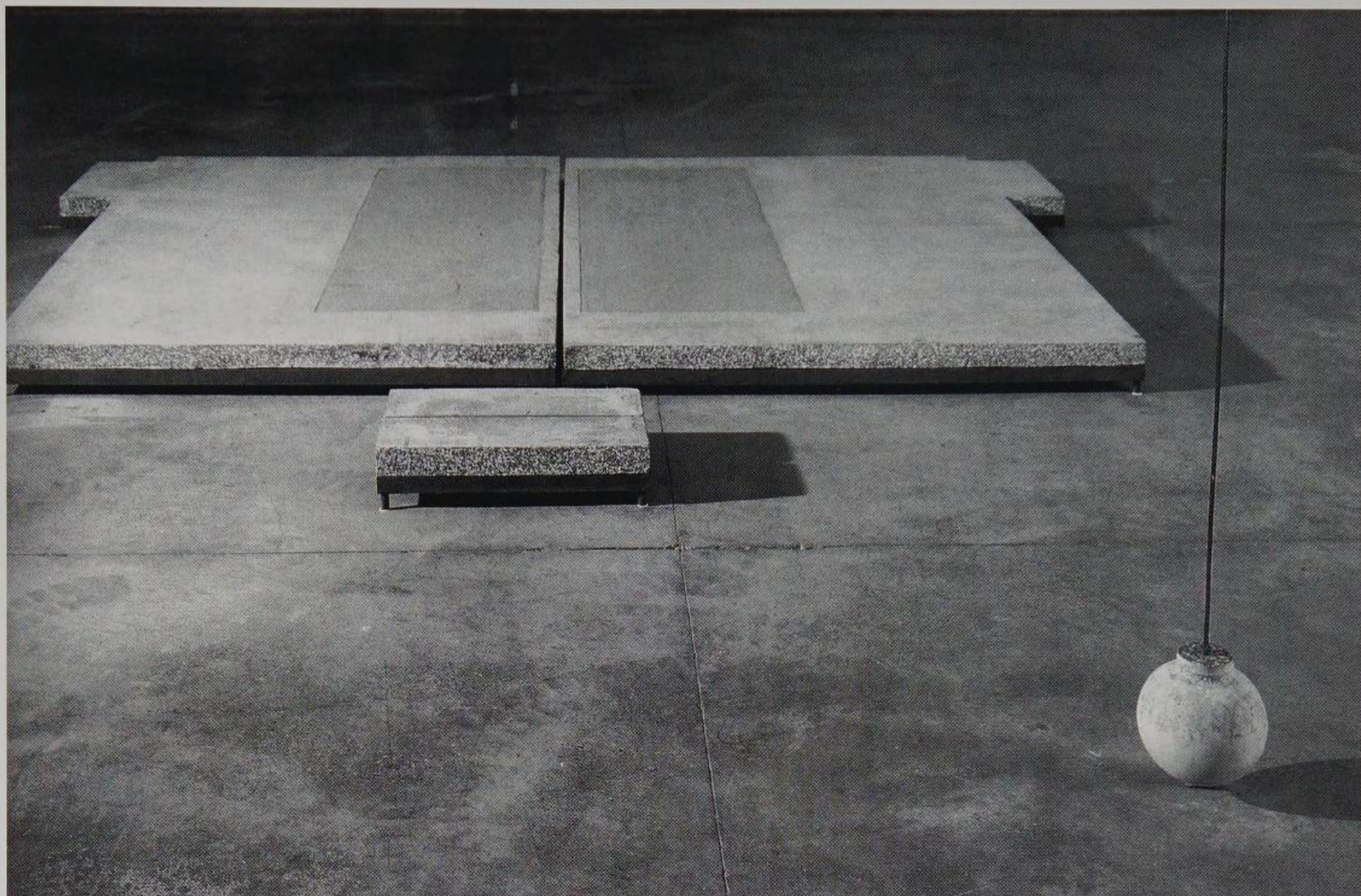
167. Feral Tribune Magazine
(started in 1984)
Did we fight for that?
digital photomontage, front
cover, issue N° 432, Split, 1993





168. Weekend Art:
Aleksandar Battista Ilić
(1965, Zagreb), Ivana Keser
(1967, Zagreb), Tomislav
Gotovac (1937, Sombor)
Hallelujah the Hill
ten year performance and
series of 3000 photographs,
1995–2005, photograph by
Aleksandar Battista Ilić





Opposite page:

169. **Mladen Stilinović**
(1947, Belgrade)
*An artist who cannot speak
English is no artist*
acrylic on artificial silk,
100 × 200 cm, 1994

170. **Goran Trbuljak**
(1948, Varaždin)
*... Old and bald I search
for ... a gallery*
screenprint on paper,
50 × 70 cm, posters around
Zagreb, 1994

This page:

171. **Mirosław Bałka**
(1958, Warsaw)
2 × (190 × 60 × 8),
from *The Ramp*
mixed media, 2 parts,
190 × 60 × 8 cm each,
1994

172. **Attila Csörgö**
(1965, Budapest)
The Maelström Project
motor oil, electric motor,
aluminium container,
57 × 57 × 60 cm, 1995



Top:

173. Eglė Rakauskaitė
(1967, Vilnius)
*Trap: Expulsion
from Paradise*
live sculpture,
1995

Bottom left:

174. Yevgeny Yufit
(1961, Leningrad) and
Necrorealism (mid 80s–
early 90s) shooting of the film
The Wooden Room
photograph, 1995

Bottom right:

175. Ivan Csudai
(1959, Svodov)
Dying Sun
from the *Nine Easy Pieces* series
oil on canvas, 200 × 169 cm,
detail, 1996



176. Oļegs Tillbergs
(1956, Saulkrasti)
detail of the solo exhibition
Look into my Eyes
installation, Art Museum
Arsenals, Riga, 1996

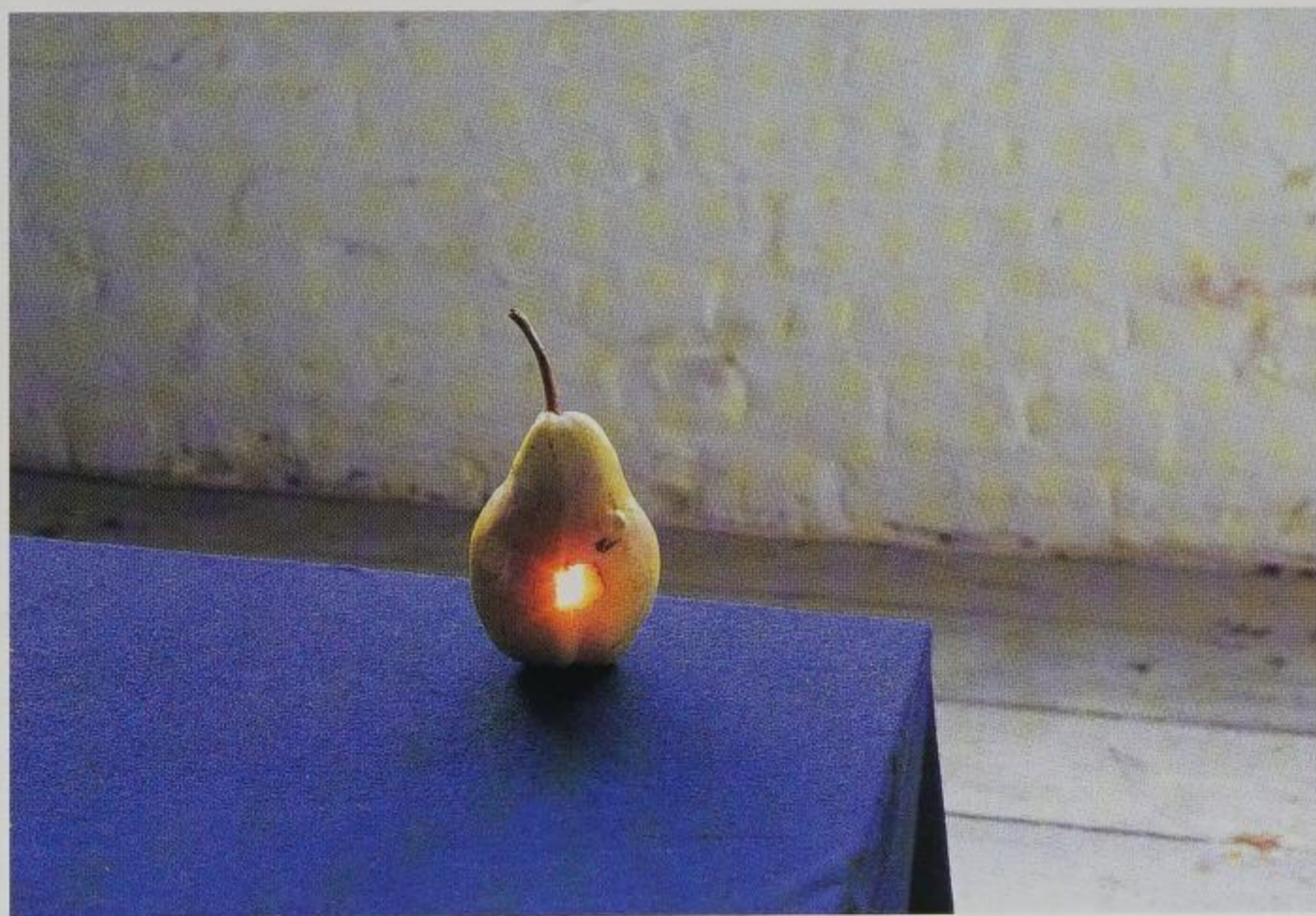
177. IRWIN (1983):
Dušan Mandič (1954,
Ljubljana), Miran Mohar
(1958, Novo Mesto), Andrej
Savski (1961, Ljubljana),
Roman Uranjek (1961,
Trbovlje), Borut Vogeljik
(1959, Radovljica)
Irwin Live
installations, 5 × 3 m, 1996



178. Roman Ondák
(1966, Bratislava)
Anonymous Room
installation, 1996

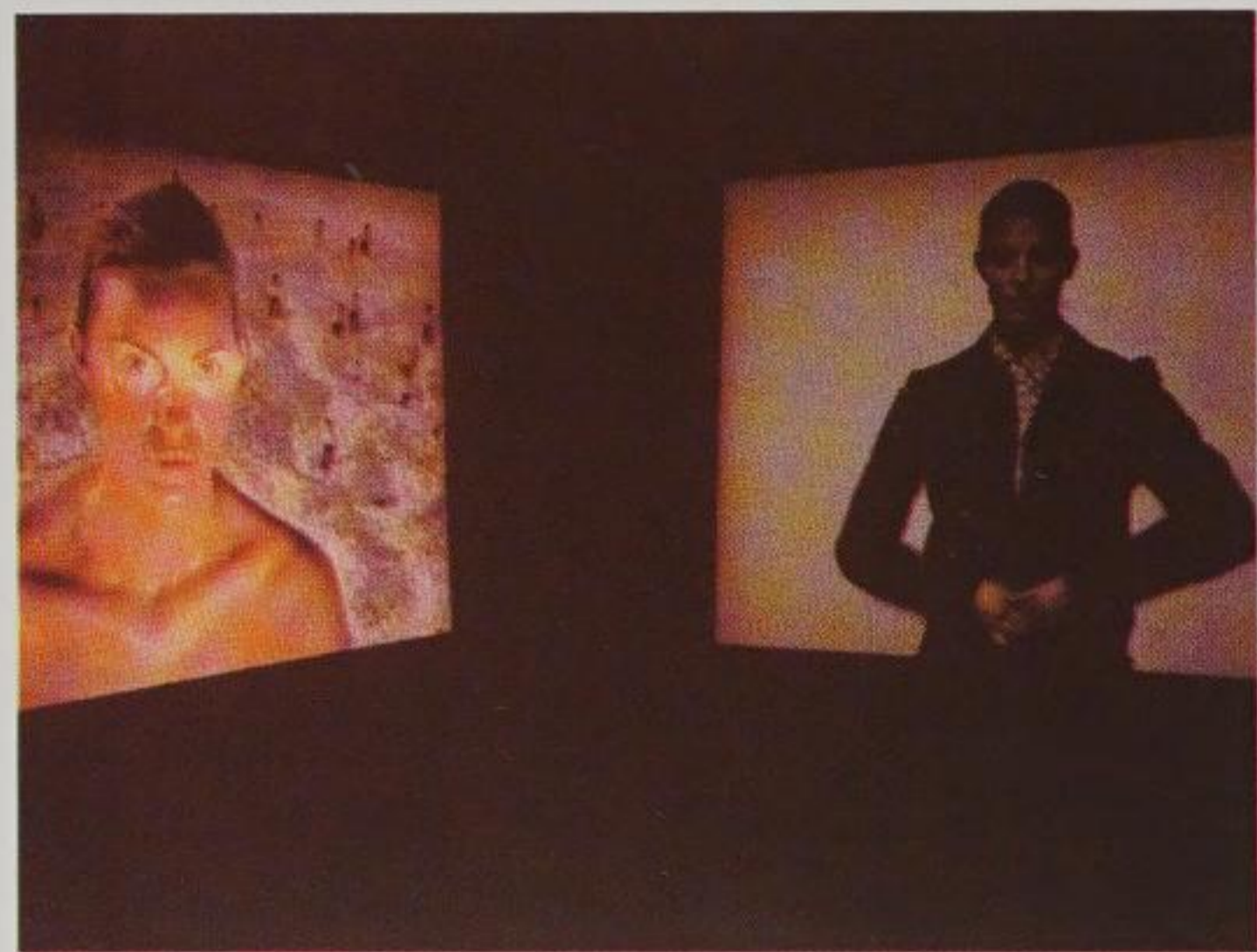


179. Zbigniew Libera
(1959, Pabianice)
Lego-Concentration Camp
mixed media, 1996,
Jewish Museum, New York



180. Gints Gabrans
(1970, Valmiera)
Untitled (Biosport)
installation, 5 × 12 × 3 m, 1996

181. Róza El-Hassan
(1966, Budapest)
Gleaming Fruit
pear, bulb, cable, 1996



Top:

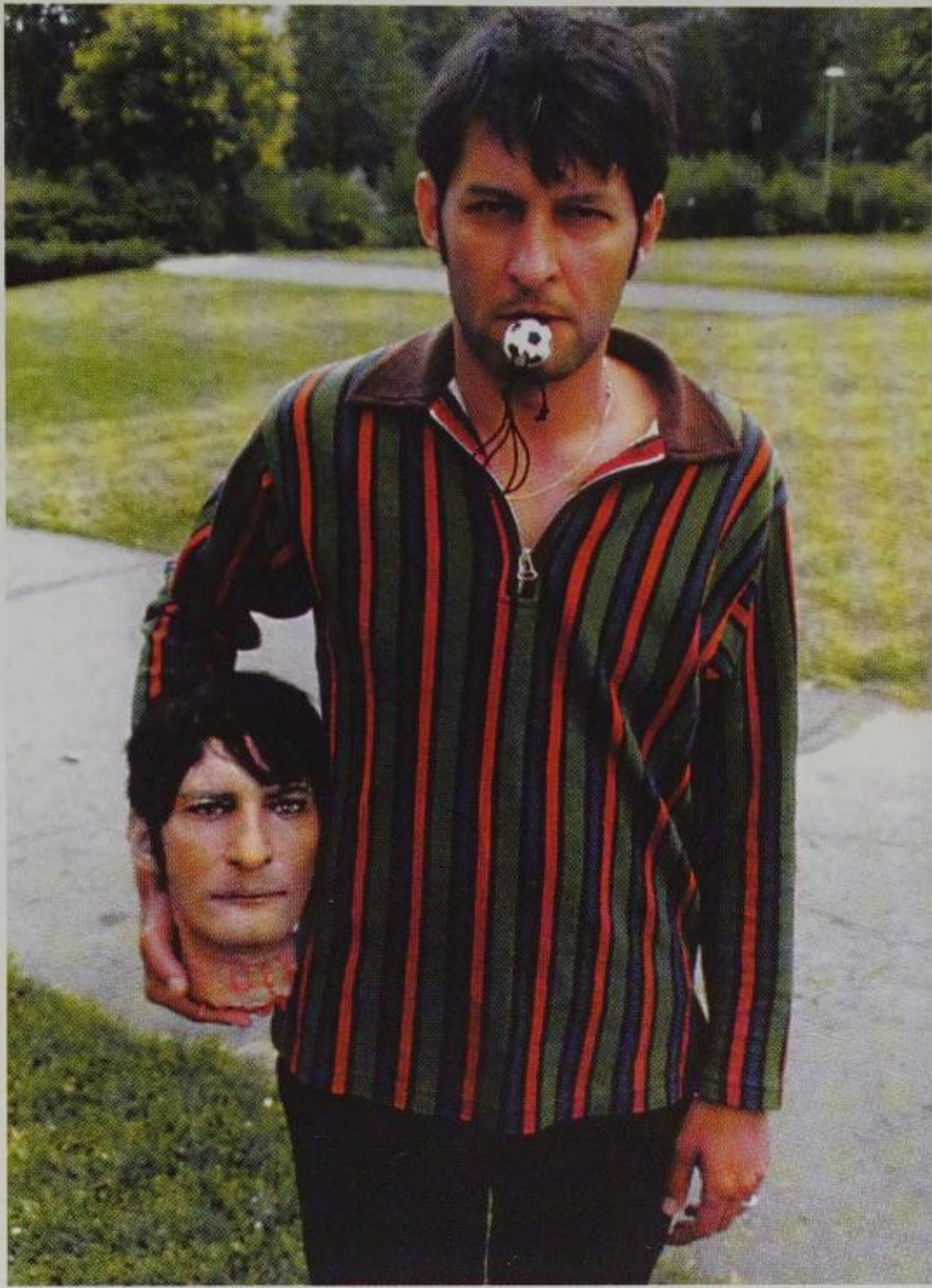
182. **Aija Zariņa**
(1954, Sauka Village)
Sign
acrylic and oil on cardboard,
4 × 14 m, 1996

Bottom left:

183. **Milica Tomić**
(1960, Belgrade)
XY Ungelöst —
Reconstruction of a Crime
video installation, 1997

Bottom right:

184. **Amir Vuk**
(1957, Sarajevo)
Avlija 21
café, 50 m²
1997



Clockwise from top left:

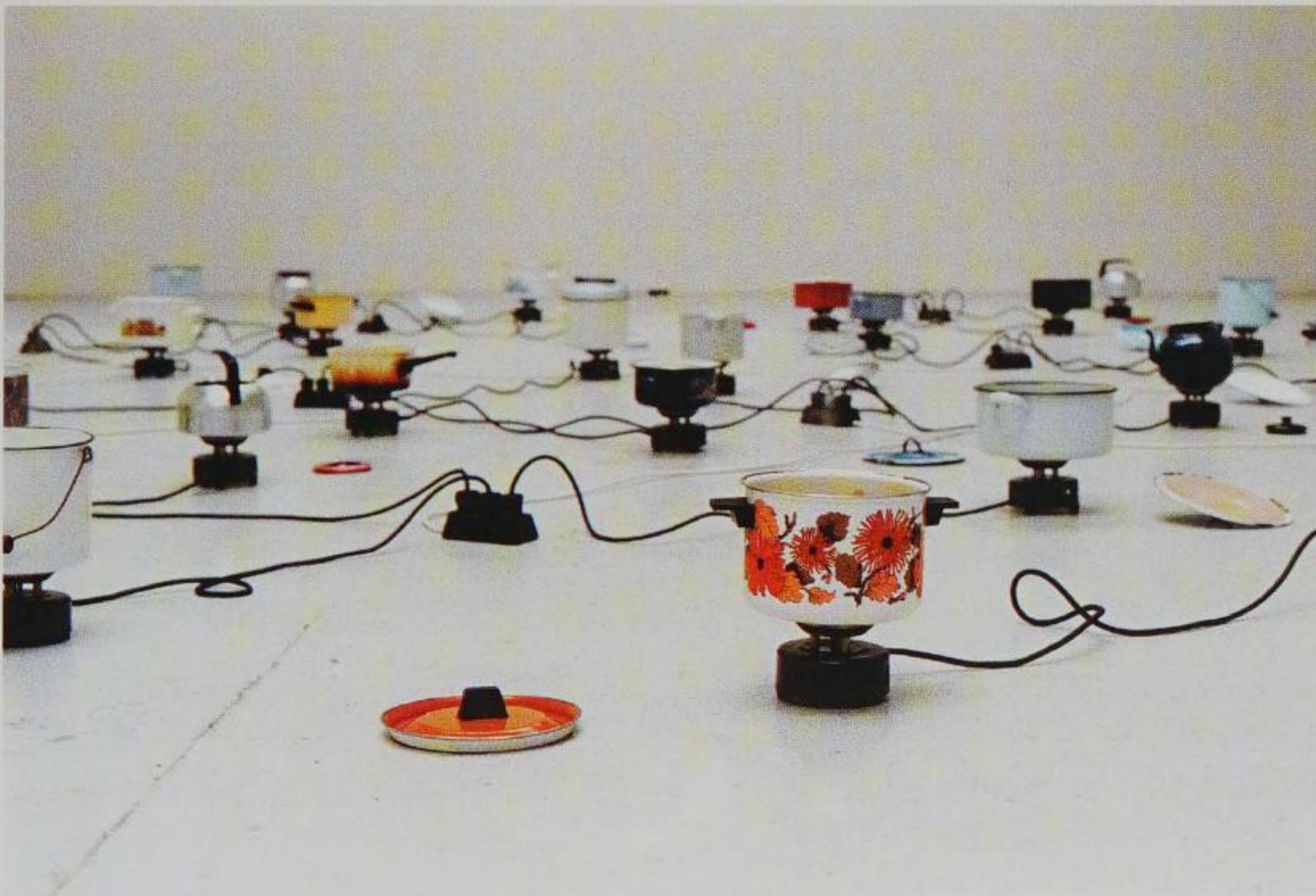
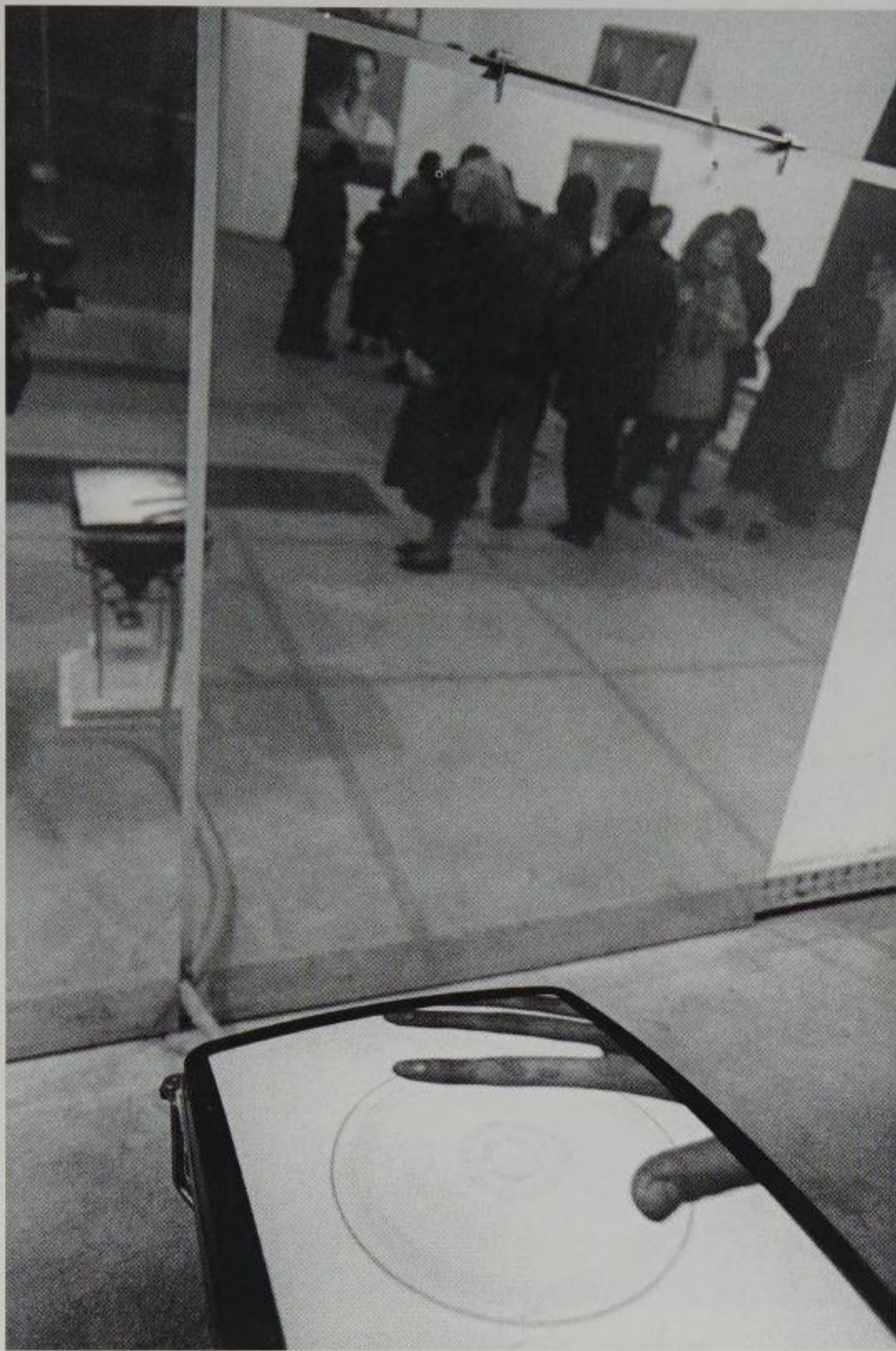
185. Tamás Komoróczy
(1963, Békéscsaba)
Komyofej 1-7
series of photographs,
50 x 65 cm each, 1997

186. Tanja Ristovski
(1969, Belgrade)
Meditation on Belonging
performance, photograph,
1997

187. Denisa Lehocká
(1971, Bratislava)
Untitled
hair, wall painting, 1997



188. **Tanja Ostojić**
(1972, Užice)
Personal Space
performance, 1996

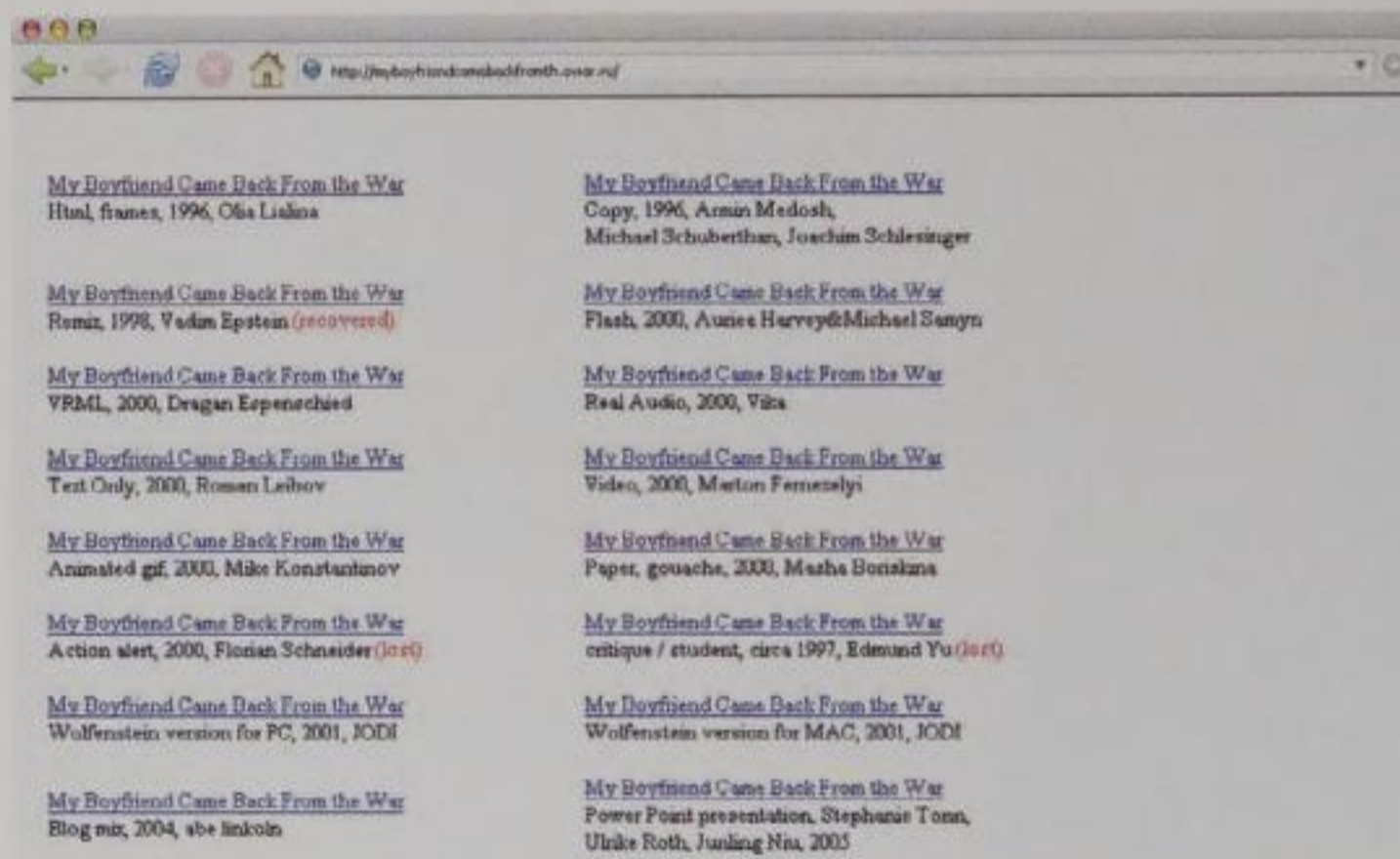
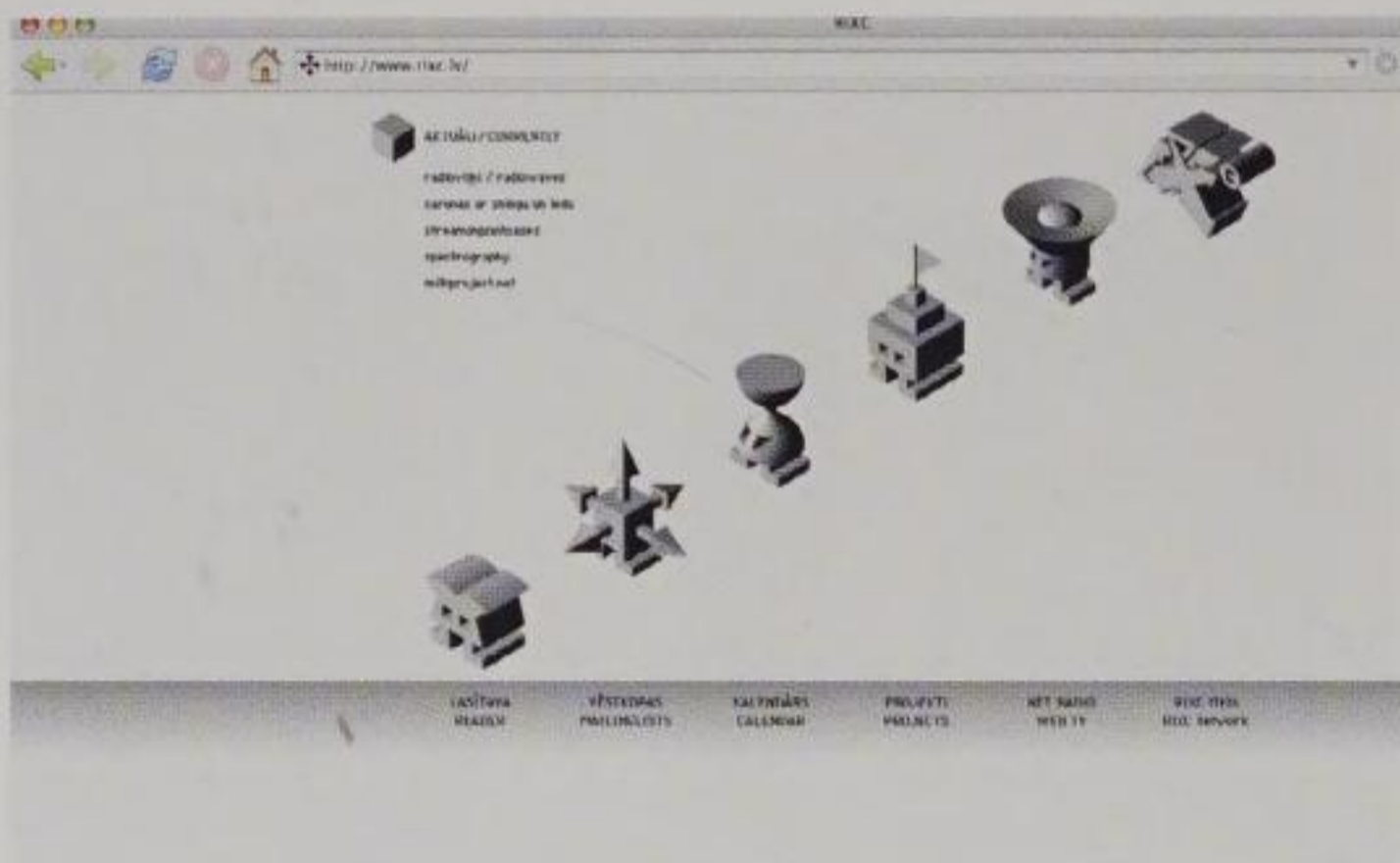
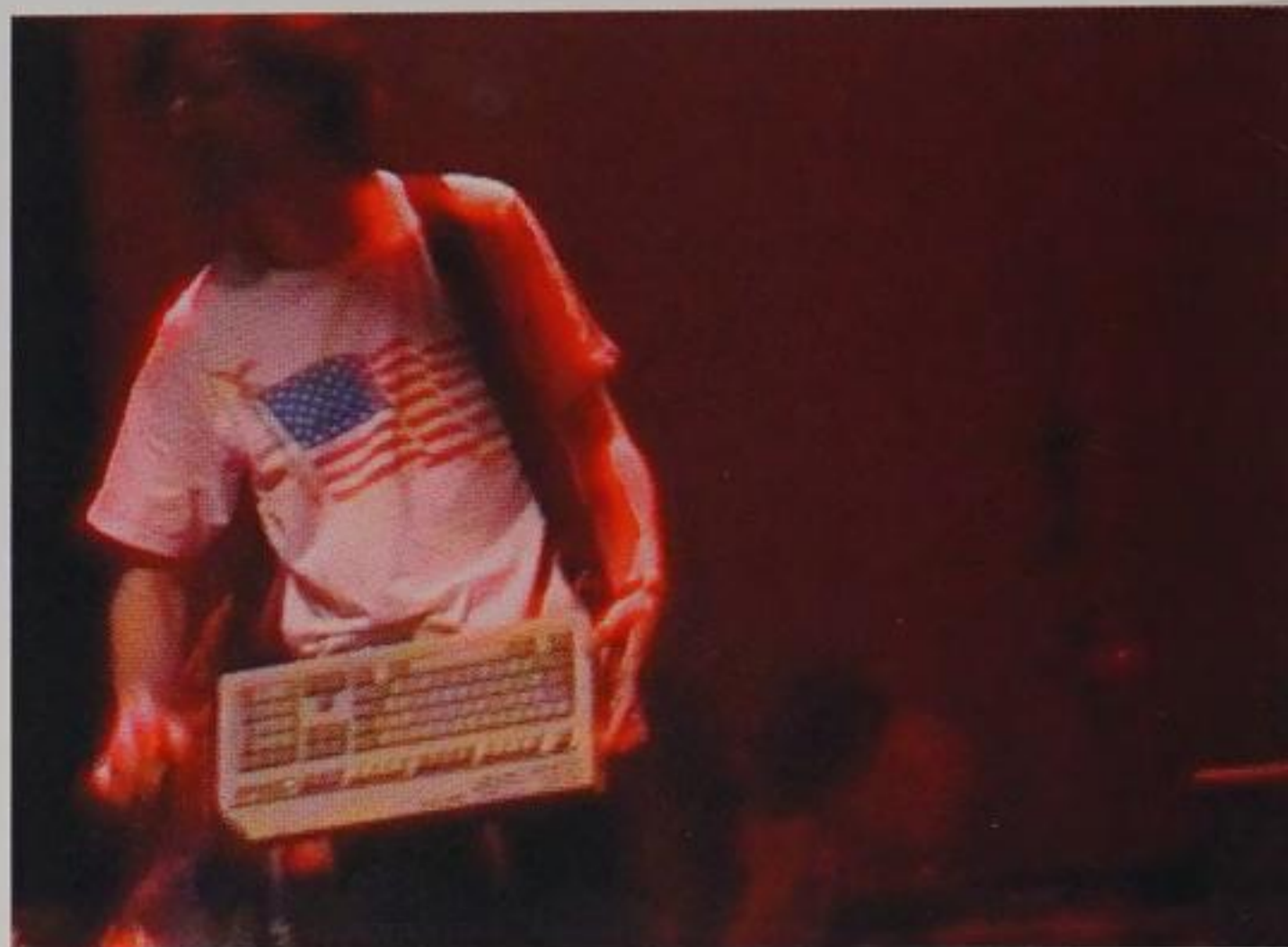


Clockwise from top left:

189. Zoran Naskovski
(1960, Izbište)
Voice of the Hand
video-installation, 1997

190. Dragomir Ugren
(1951, Bosanska Krupa)
Untitled
installation, Konkordija,
Vršac, 1997

191. Pravdoliub Ivanov
(1964, Plovdiv)
*Transformation always takes
time and energy*
installation, hot plates,
pots, cables, water, electricity,
dimensions variable,
1997, photograph by
Pravdoliub Ivanov



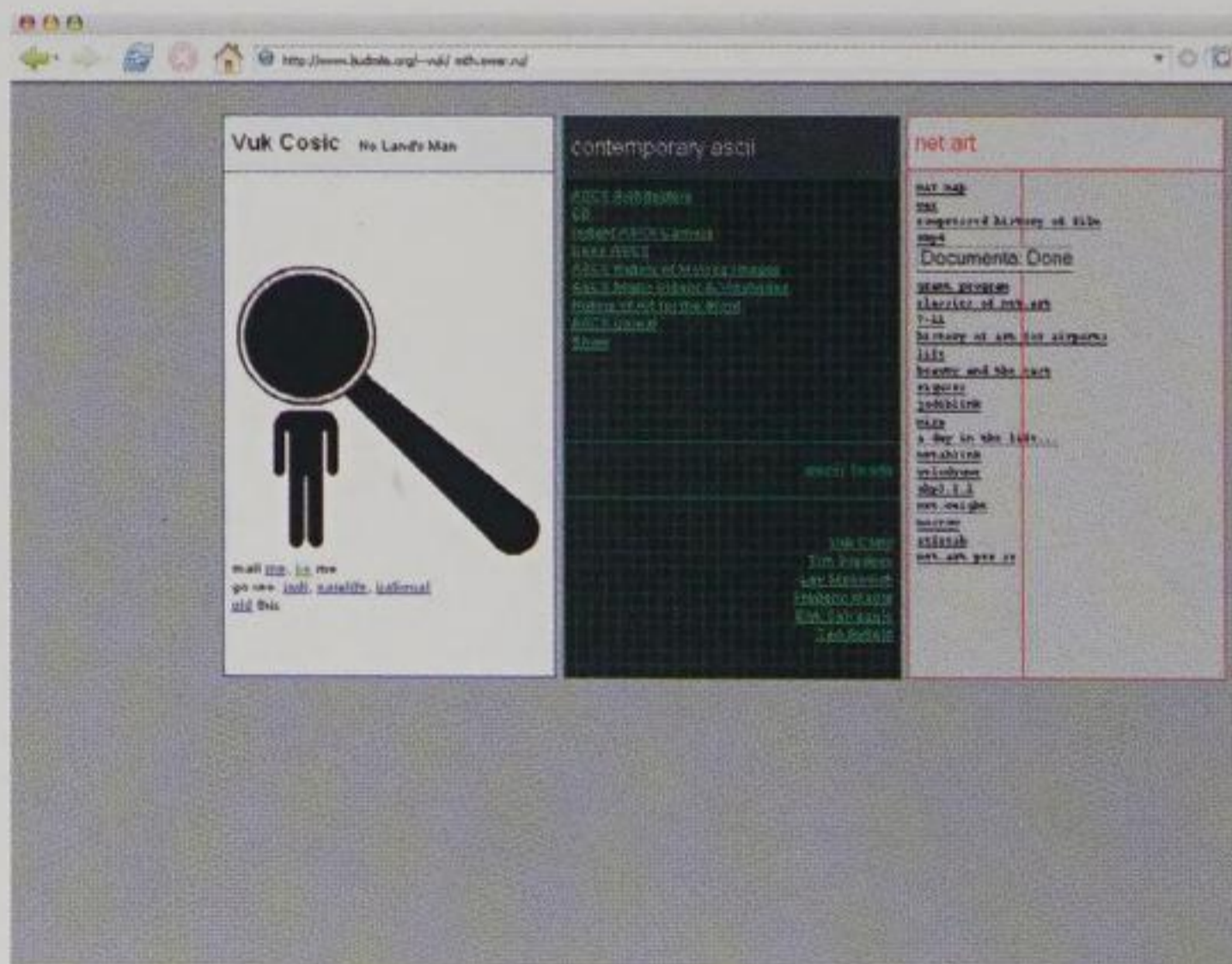
Clockwise from top left:

192 + 193. **Alexei Shulgin**
(1963, Moscow)
386 DX
website and music
performance, 1998
www.easylife.org

194. **Olia Lialina**
(1971, Moscow)
*My Boyfriend Came Back
from the War*
net art project, 1996
www.teleportacia.org

195. **Vuk Ćosić**
(1966, Belgrade)
Documenta Done
net art project, 1997
www.ljudmila.org/~vuk

196. **RIXC** (1996)
Media Culture in Riga
website
www.rixc.lv





197. Vlado Martek
(1951, Zagreb)
USA-Balkans
silkscreen on paper,
22 x 30.5 cm, 1996

198. Marko Peljhan
(1969, Šempeter pri
Novi Gorici)
Makrolab
long-term research project,
1997–2007



Clockwise from top left:

199. **The Ljubljana
Alternative or Subcultural
Movement — The Ljubljana
Lacan School — Slavoj Žižek**
(early 1980s)
portrait of Slavoj Žižek,
video still from film
Retroavantgarde
by Gržinić & Šmid, 1997

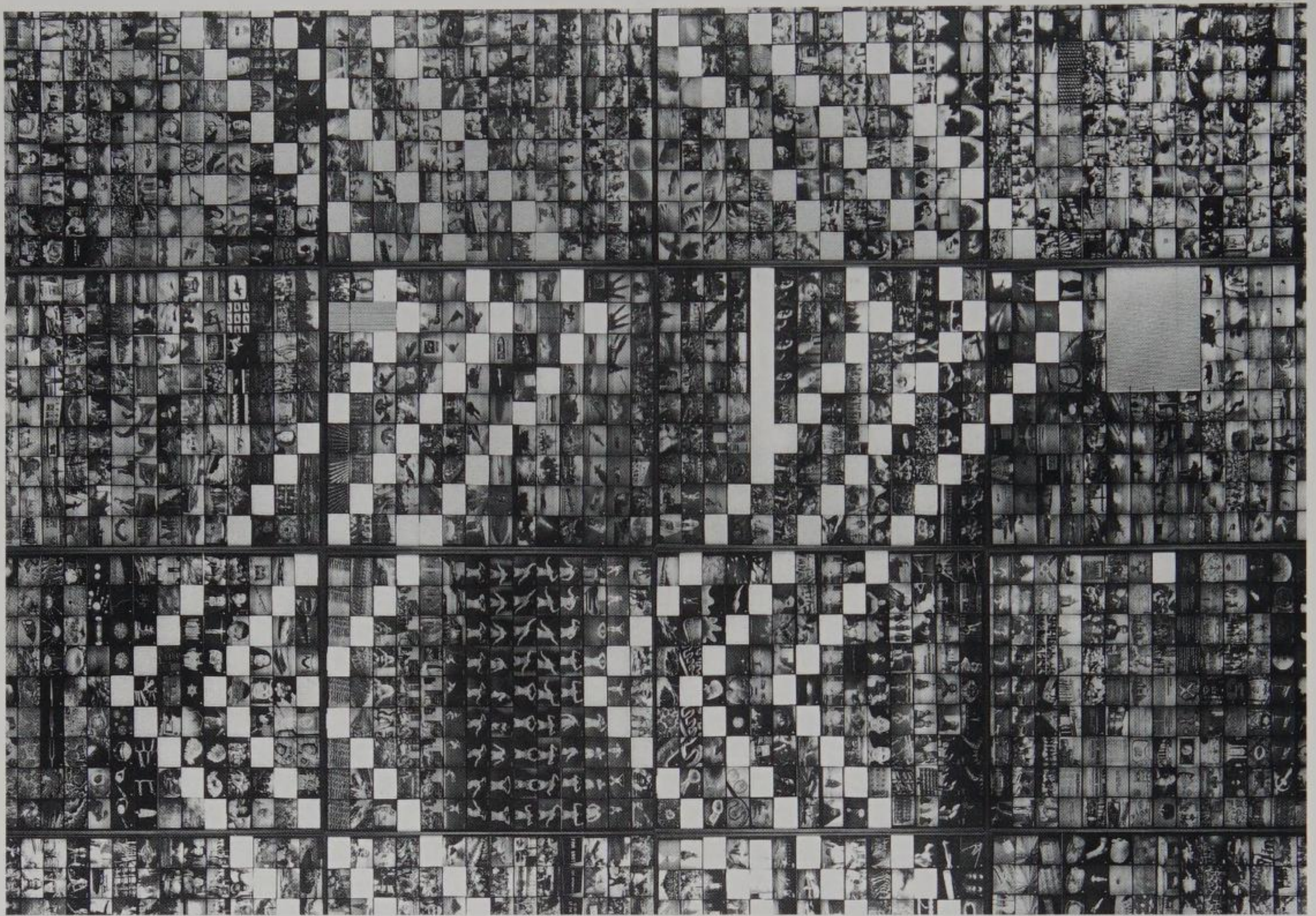
200. **Alban Hajdinaj**
(1974, Tirana)
Chinese Flowers from Albania
photograph, 50 × 70 cm, 1999

201. **Paulius Stanikas**
(1962, Vilnius) and Svajonė
Stanikas (1961, Vilnius)
*Your Father, Your Son and
Your Daughter*
sculpture, 1998



202. Carsten Nicolai
(1965, Karl-Marx-Stadt, GDR)
Bausatz Noto/∞
installation, steel table,
rubber, turn tables, mixing
board, headphones, records,
200 × 100 × 80 cm, 1997–98

203. Gera Grozdanić
(1955, Vršac)
The Leader
installation, 1998

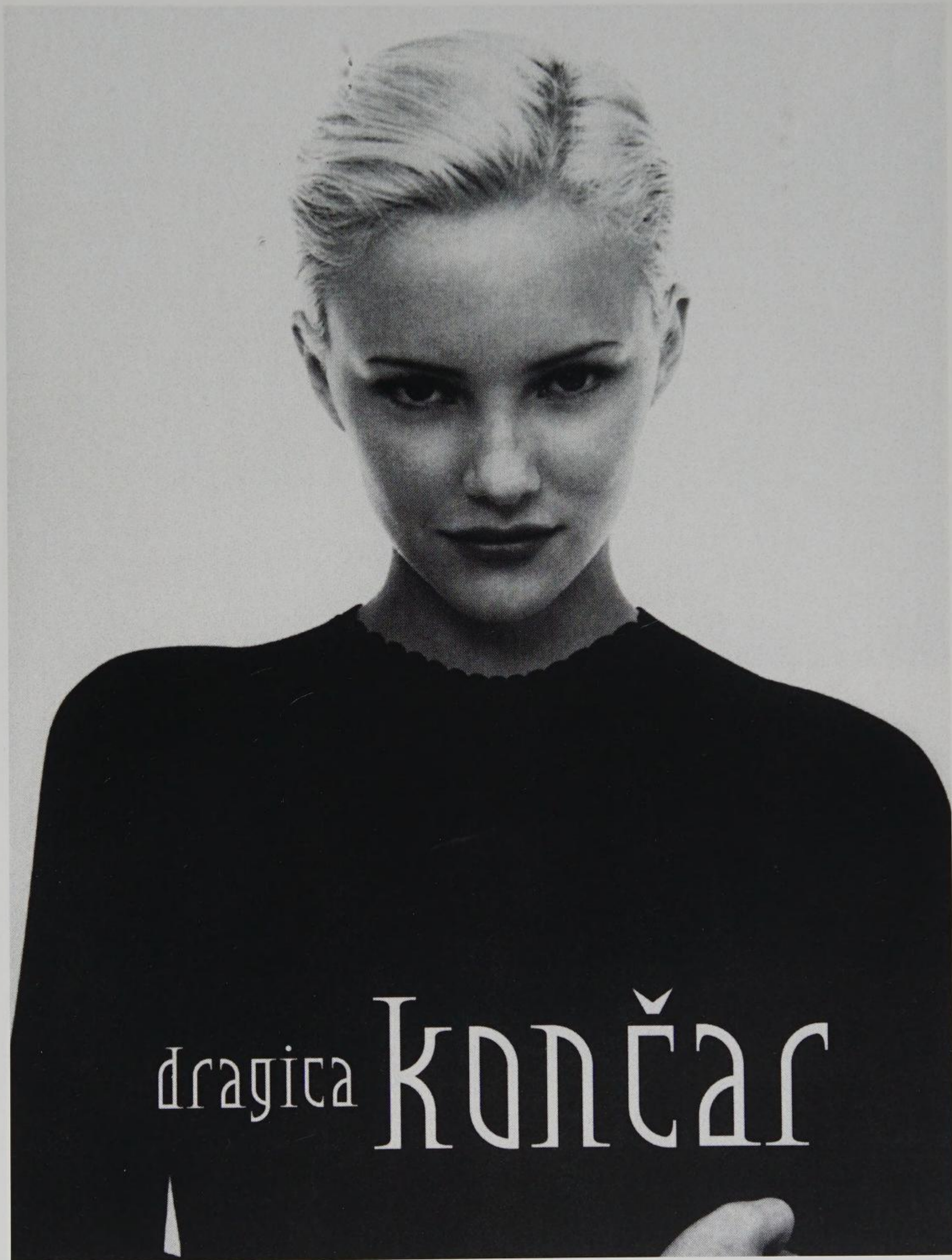


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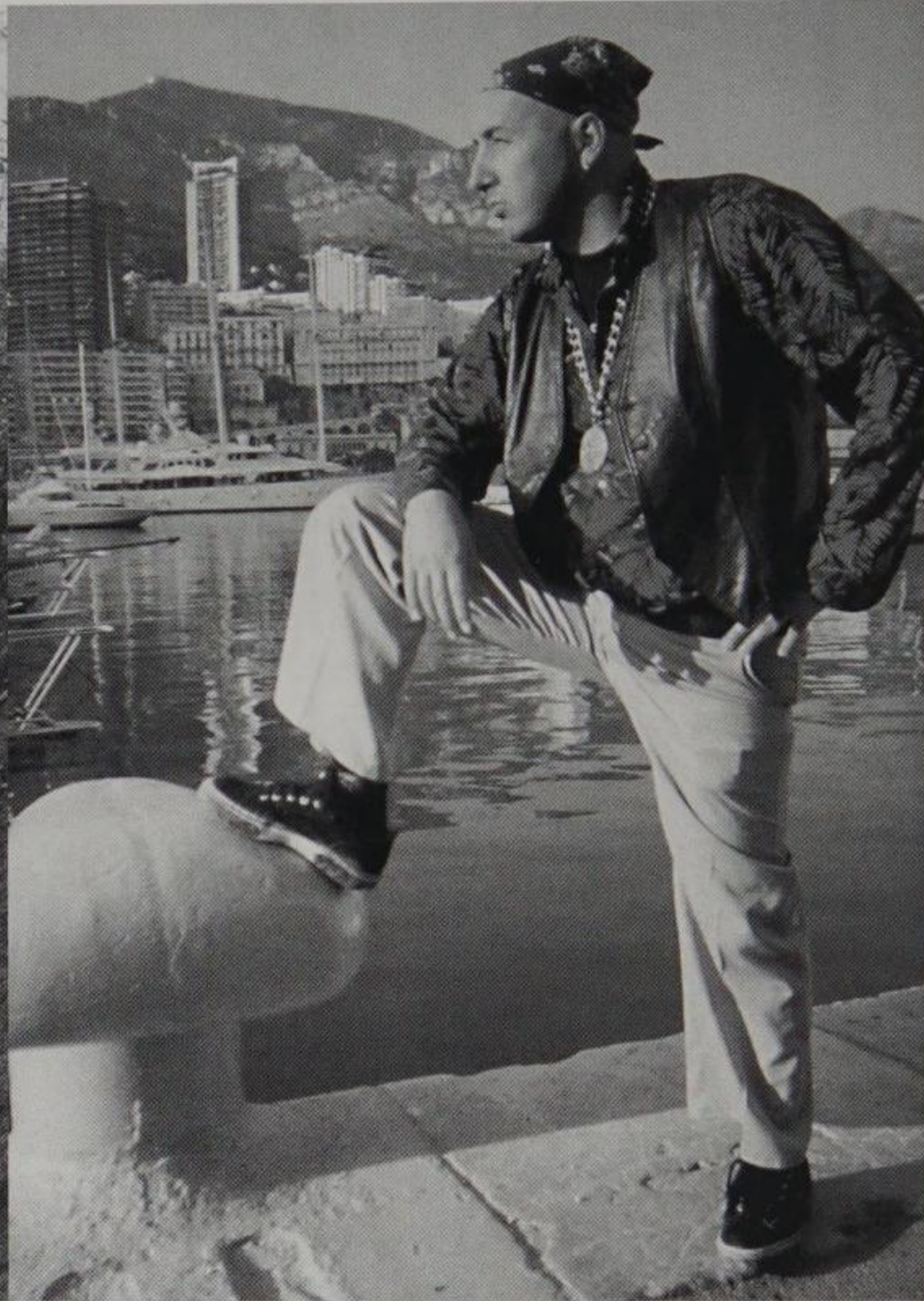
204. **Zofia Kulik**
(1947, Wrocław)
From Siberia to Cyberia
photo-tableau detail,
1999

Opposite page:

205. **Sanja Iveković**
(1949, Zagreb)
Gen XX — Dragica Končar
media project, Zagreb,
1997–1998



dragica KONČAR



206. Nebojša Šerić Šoba
(1968, Sarajevo)
Untitled
photograph, 1998



207. Katarzyna Kozyra
(1963, Warsaw)
The Women's Bathhouse
video installation, 1998

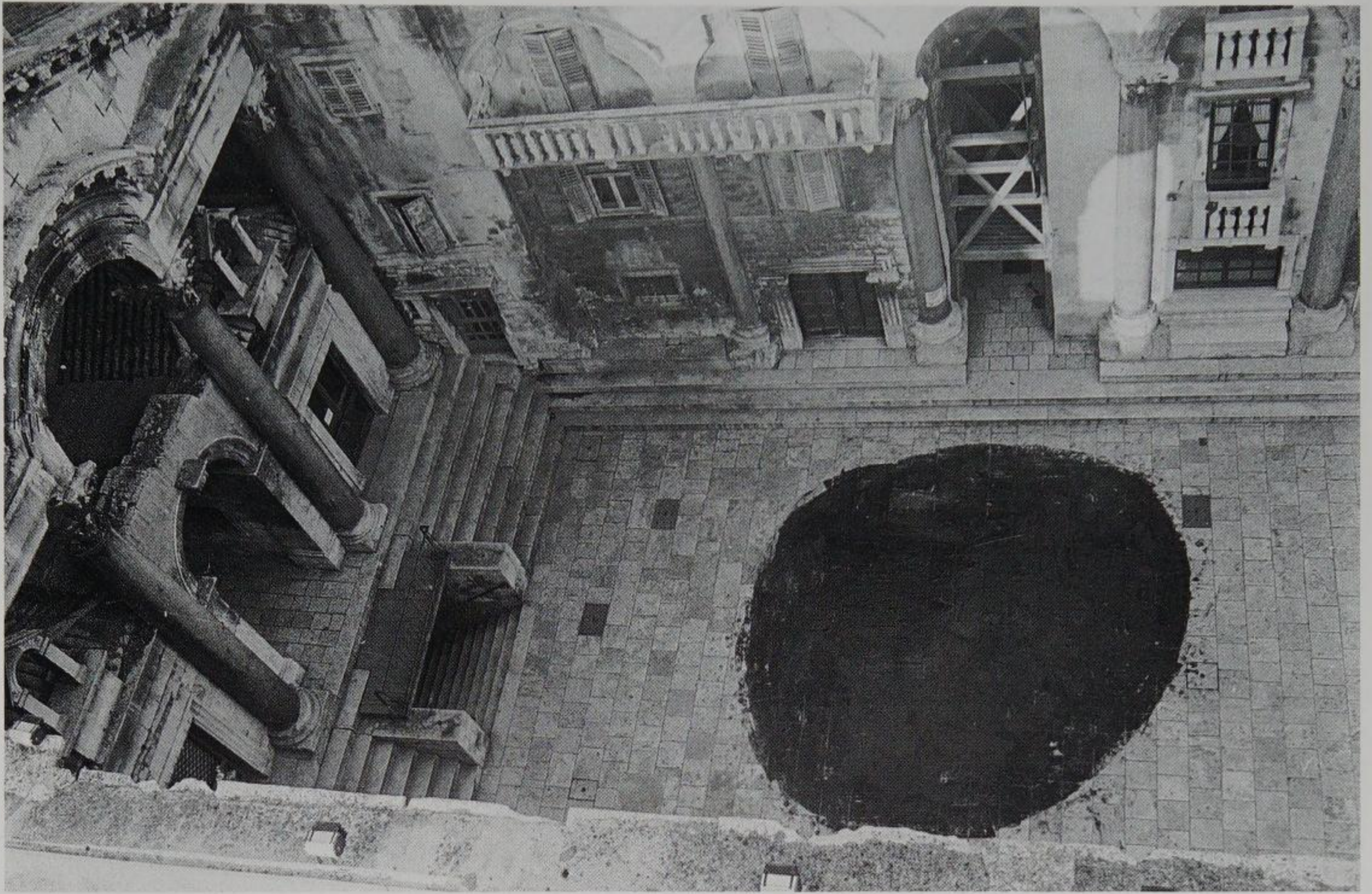
208. Anri Sala
(1974, Tirana)
Intervista — Finding the Words
video installation, 1998



209. **Jaan Toomik**
(1961, Tartu)
Father and Son
video installation, 1998

210. **Rassim** (1972, Pleven)
Corrections 1998–2001
action, gym sessions,
proteins, diet, vitamins, video
documentation, texts





211. Anonymous Author
and the Manager
Untitled
urban intervention, Split,
11 January 1998

212. Adrian Paci
(1969, Shkodra)
Apparition/Shfaqja
video installation, variable
dimensions, 1999/2000



Clockwise from top:

213. **Dragan Živadinov**
(1960, Ljubljana)
in collaboration with
Dunja Zupančič
(1963, Ljubljana)
Biomechanics Noordung
Cosmokinetic Cabinet
Noordung: attractor:
Dragan Živadinov, artifacts:
Dunja Zupančič, stage
instruments: **Staša Zupančič**,
architect: **Andraž Torkar**
project organised and
coordinated by Atol Flight
Operations, 1999

214. **Žaneta Vangeli**
(1963, Bitola)
*Culturalism, or About
the Ontological Failure
of the Tragedy*
notes of 1000 and 500
Macedonian Denars, 1999
photograph by B. Tasev

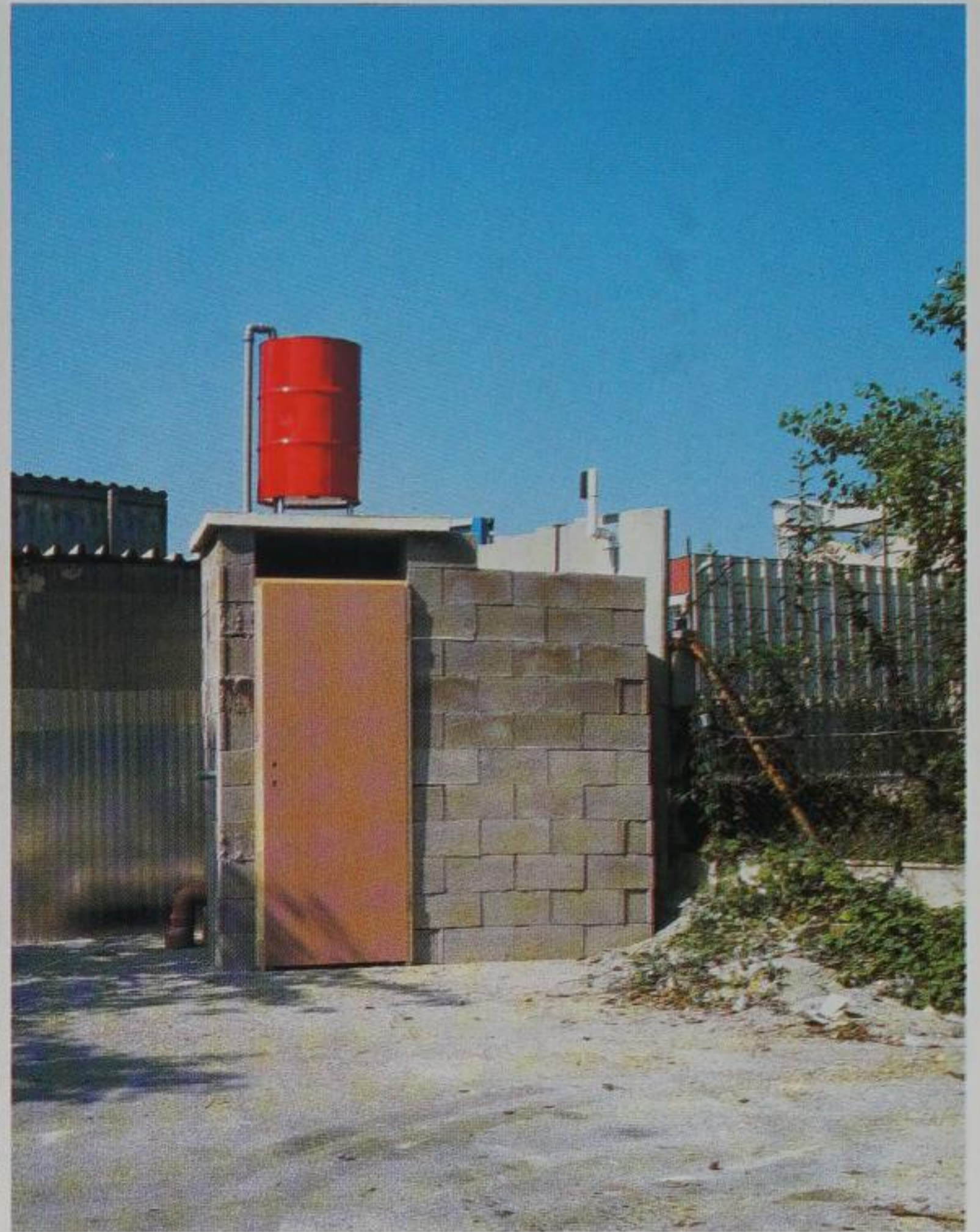
215. **Danica Dakić**
(1962, Sarajevo)
Self-Portrait
video installation, 1999



Ramshackle sheds in East Wahdat before the upgrading programme



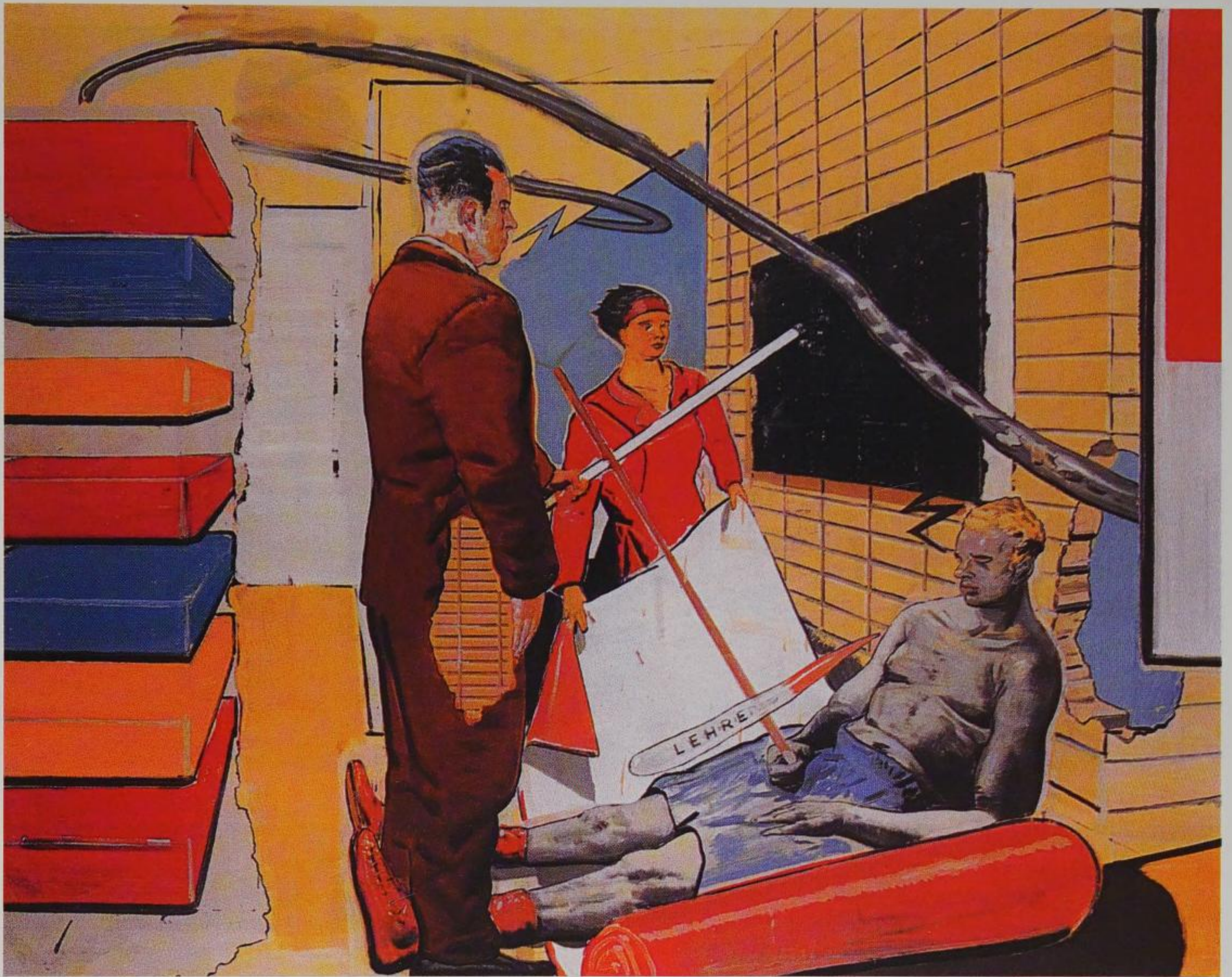
The upgrading begins to transform the neighbourhood



216. Marjetica Potrč
(1953, Ljubljana)
East Wahdat:
Upgrading Programme
installation, various
building materials,
340 × 235 × 140 cm, 1999
source image: photograph by
Jacques Betant
photograph by Matija
Pavlovec



217. **Edi Hila**
(1949, Shkodra)
Landscape 01
acrylic on canvas, 112 × 145 cm,
1999–2000



Top:

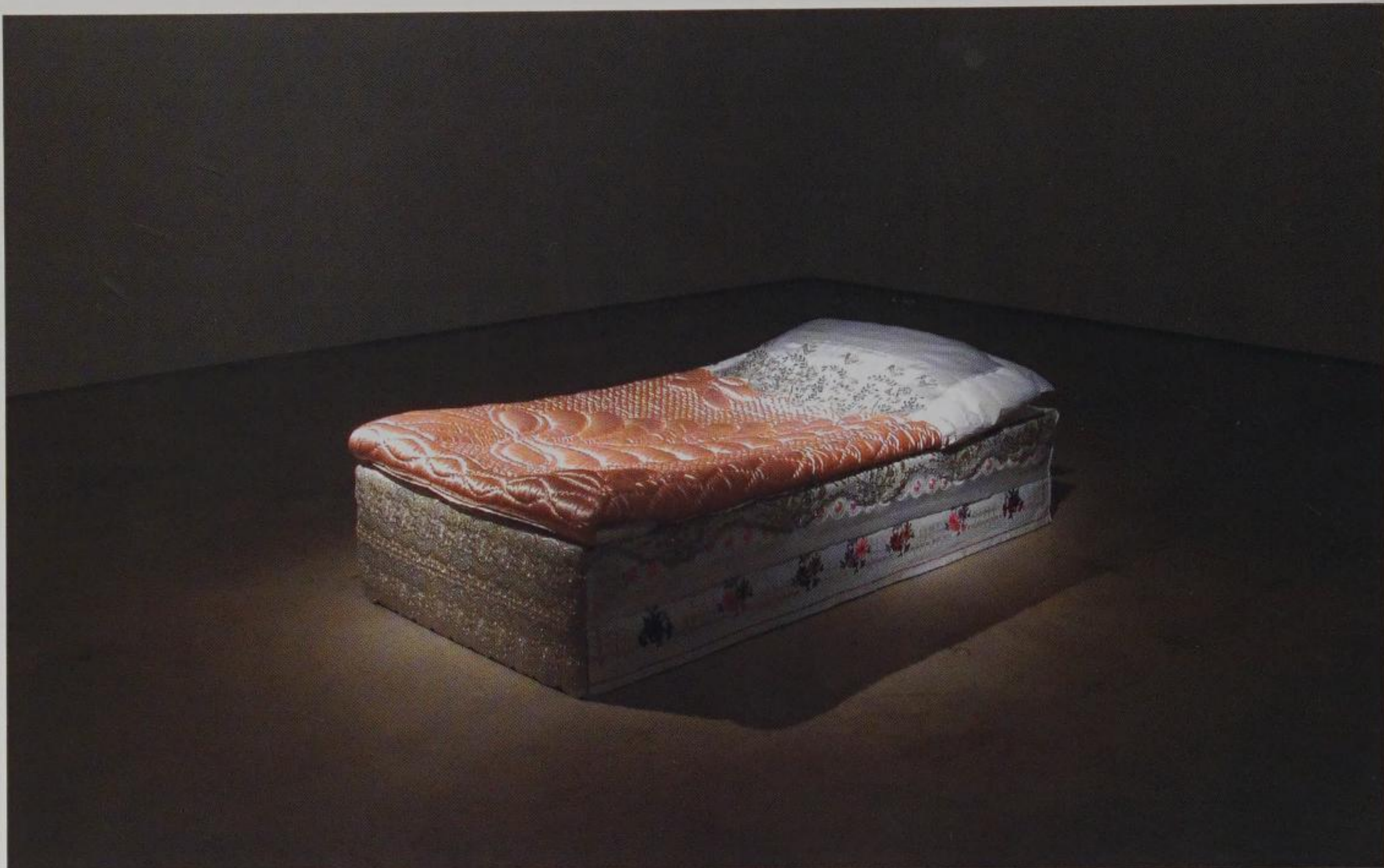
218. Neo Rauch (1960, Leipzig)
Education
oil on canvas, 200 × 250 cm,
detail, 1999

Bottom left:

219. Vladimir Nikolić
(1974, Belgrade)
Rhythm
video, 2001

Bottom right:

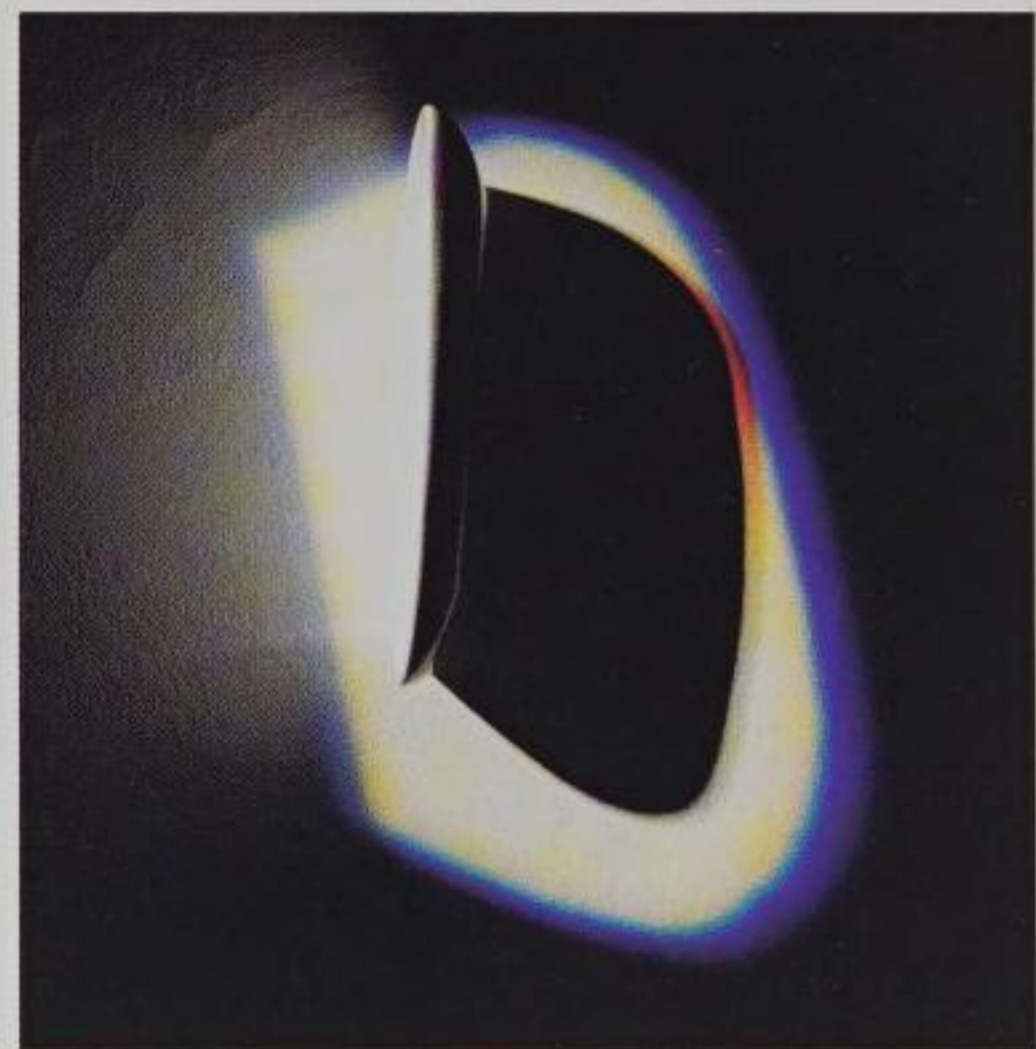
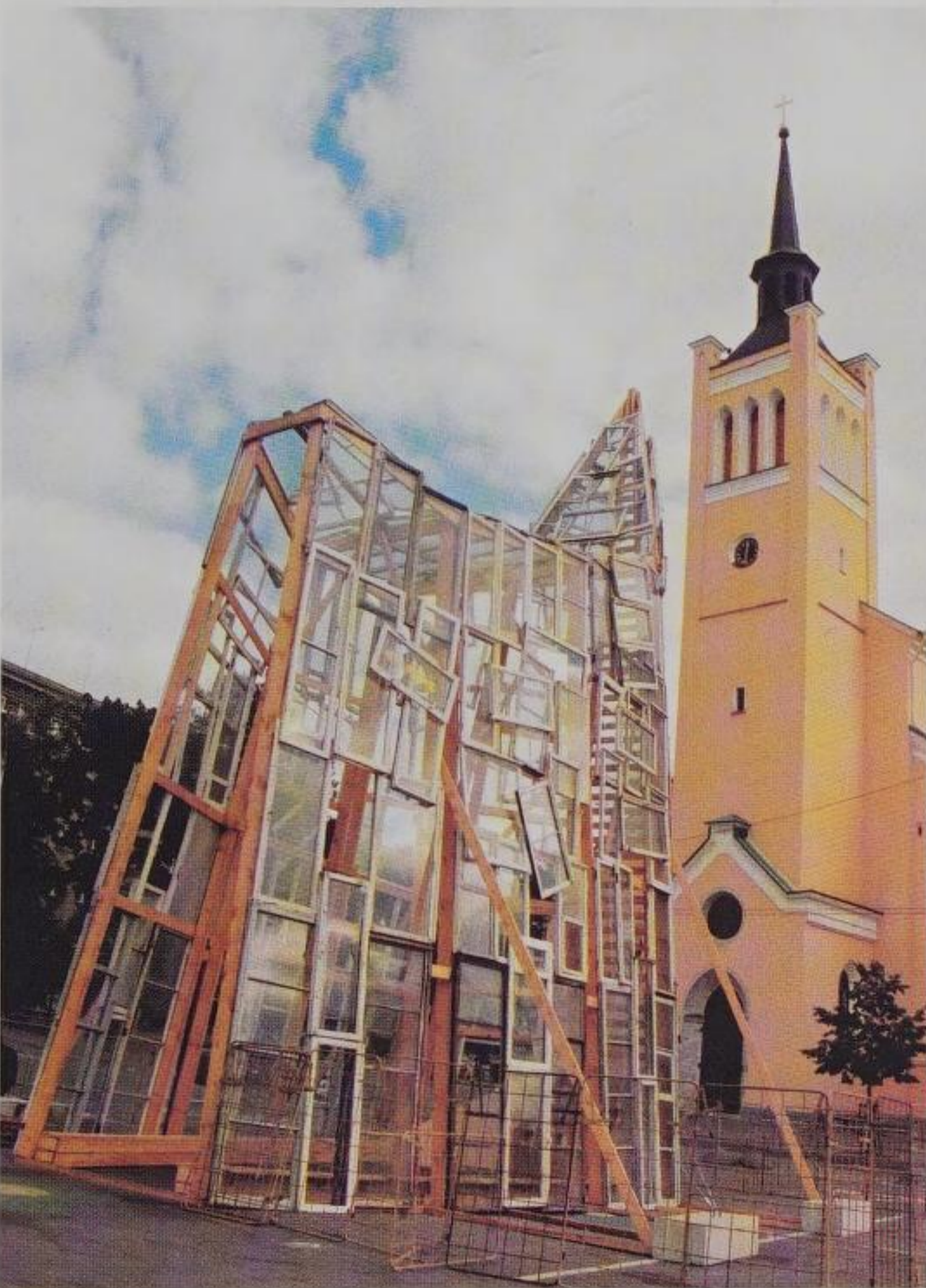
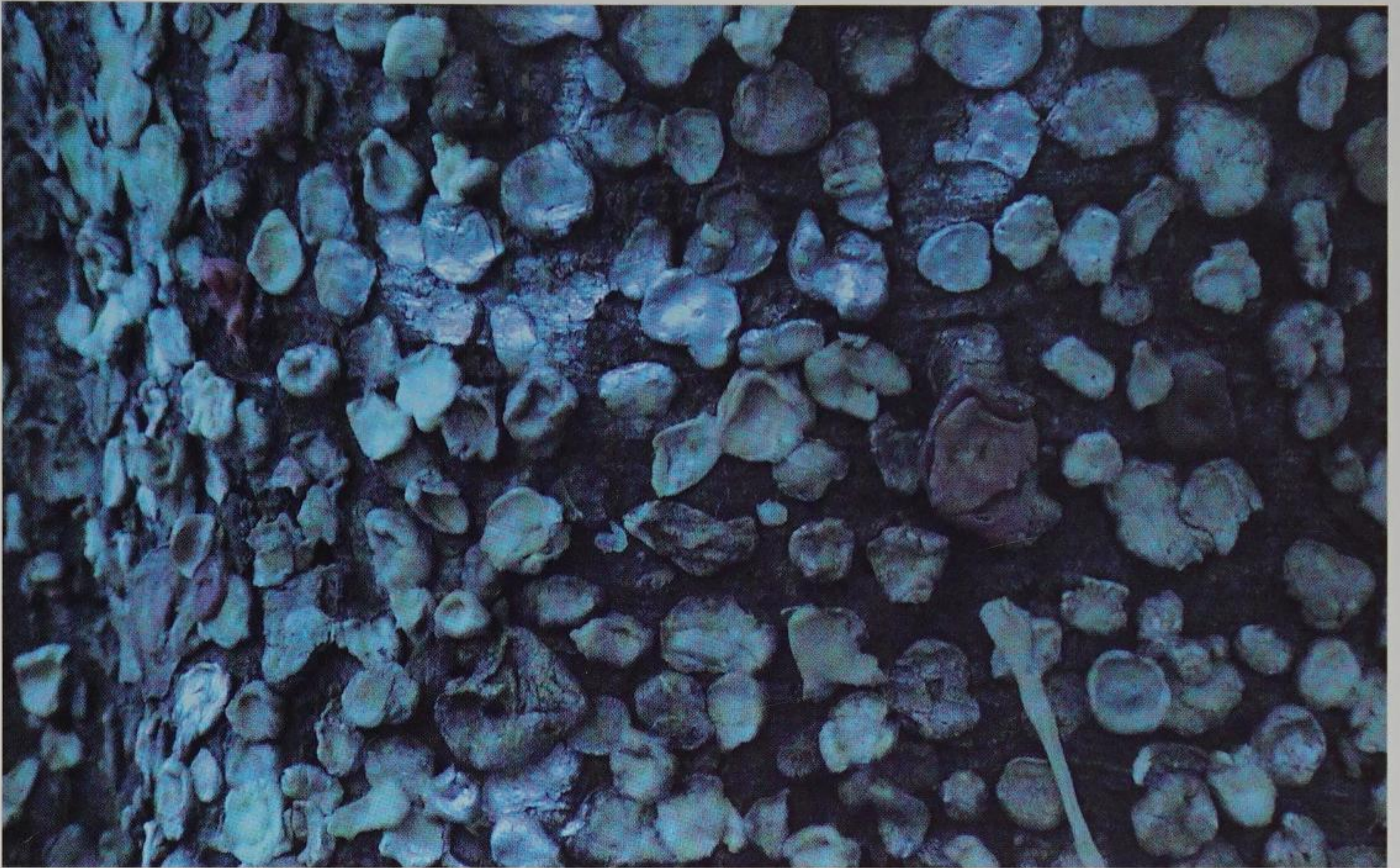
220. Pode Bal
(founded 1997, Prague)
Malík Urvi
installation view, 2000



221. Erzen Shkololli
(1976, Peja)
Bed
installation, 90×190 cm, 2000

223. Marina Gržinić
(1958, Rijeka), Aina Šmid
(1957, Ljubljana)
On the Flies of the Market Place
video, 1999

222. Artists' Group Famous
Five (1998): Ieva Rubeze
(1977, Liepaja), Līga
Marcinkeviča (1975, Saldus),
Mārtiņš Ratniks (1975, Riga),
Ervins Broks (1975, Riga),
Renārs Krūmiņš (1974, Riga)
Bloody TV
interactive video installation,
2000



224. Raoul Kurvitz
(1961, Tallinn)
Cathedral for the Homeless
installation, Tallin, 2000

225. *A Tree without an Author*
urban intervention by the
citizens of Split, chewing gum
on tree, Split, 1990s

226. Goran Petercol
(1949, Pula)
Shelf
from the series of *Bathrooms*
mixed media, 2001

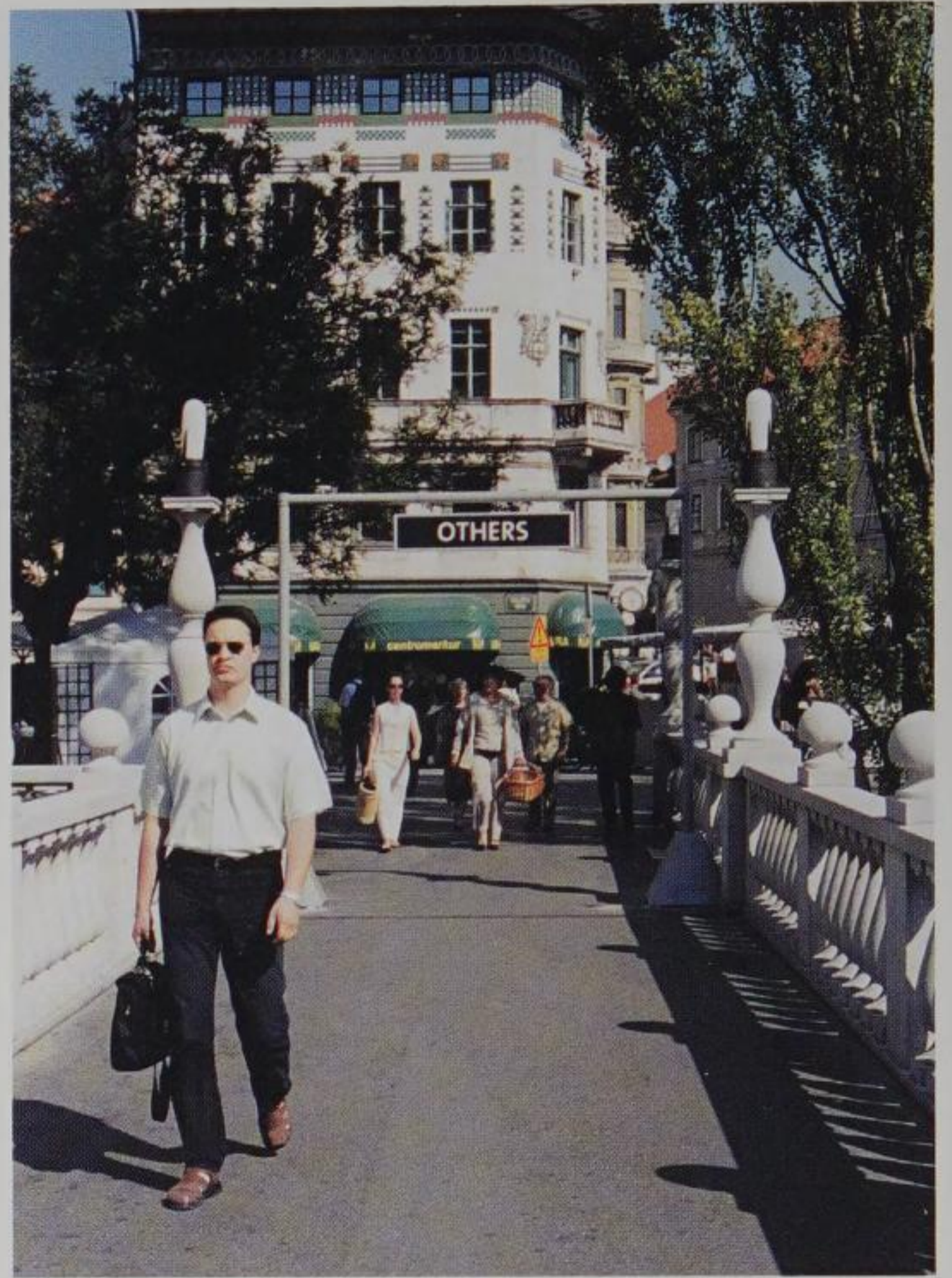
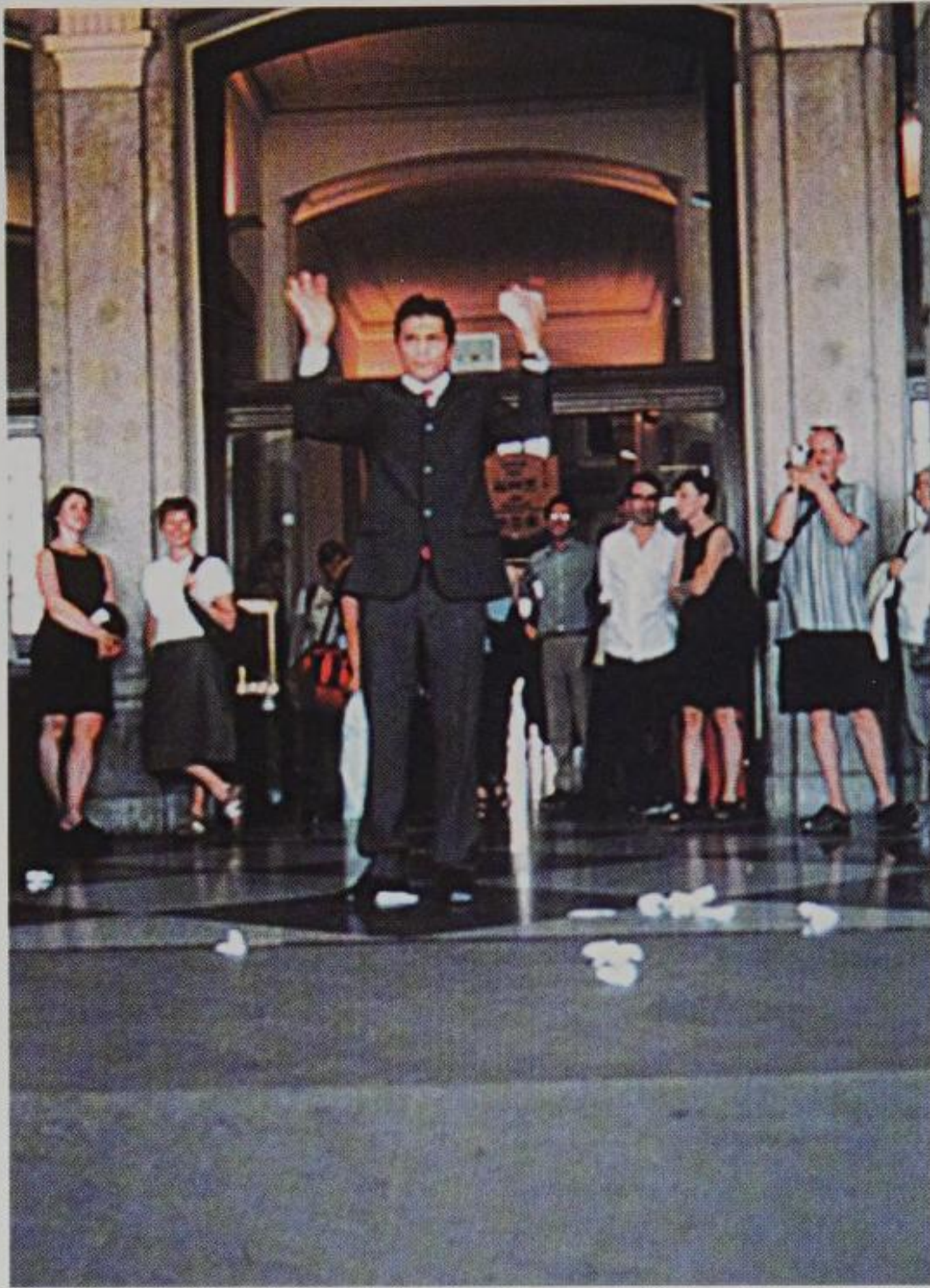


227. Alma Suljević
(1963, Kakanj)
Research for my Friends
performance at the Olympic
Stadium which was used
as a graveyard during the
war in Bosnia, 2000

228. Deimantas Narkevičius
(1964, Utena)
Energy Lithuania
super 8 film transferred onto
video (17 min), 2000



229. Igor Toševski
(1963, Skopje)
Perfect Balance —
23 Kilos of Human Rights
installation, 7 scales, 23 kg
of documents from the
UNO committee for human
rights, Museum of the City of
Skopje, 2000, photograph by
S. Nedelkovski and B. Tasev



Clockwise from top left:

230. Sislej Xhafa
(1970, Peja)
Stock Exchange
performance, Ljubljana
train station, 2000

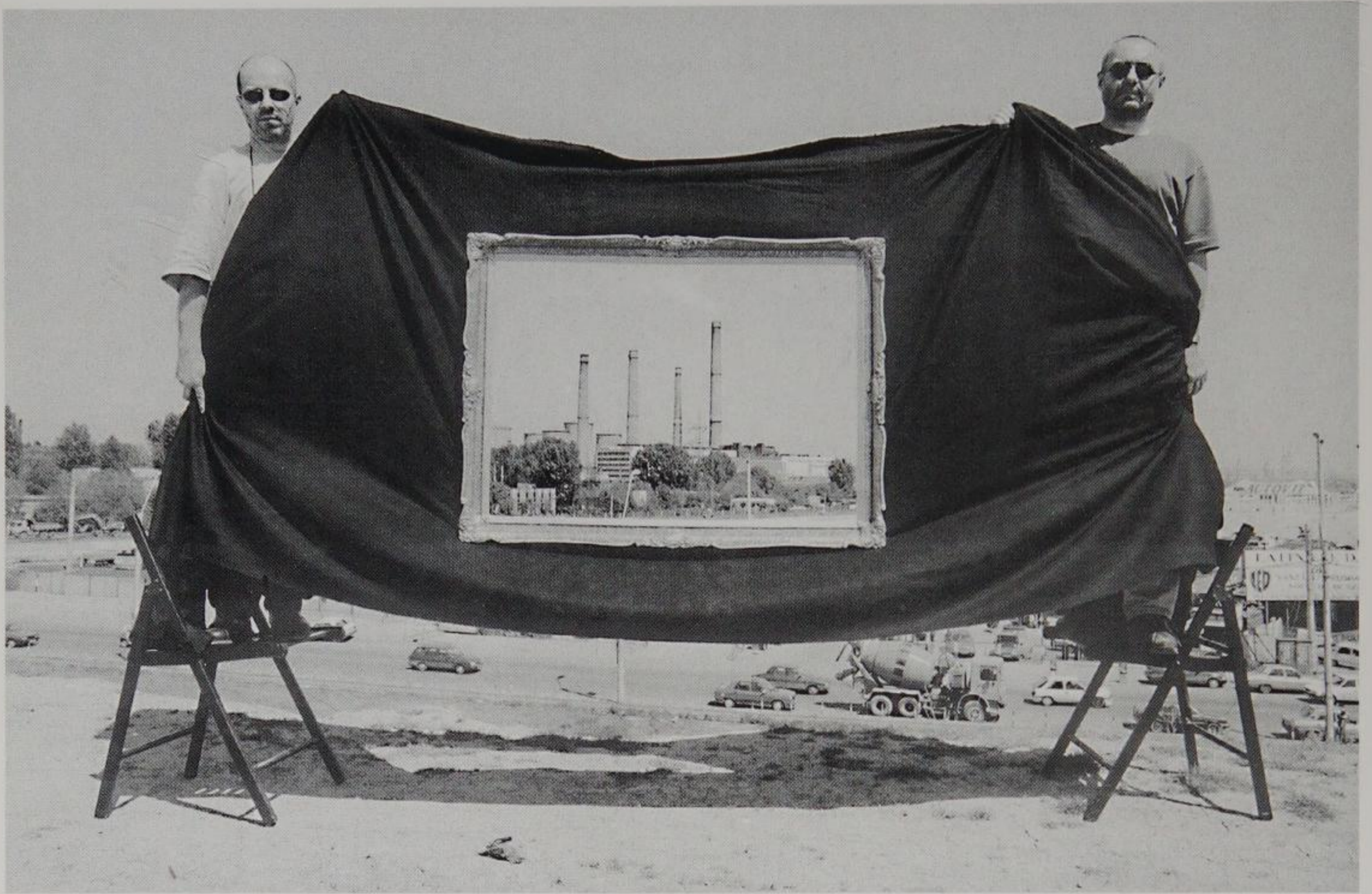
231. Šejla Kamerić
(1976, Sarajevo)
EU/Others
installation, Manifesta 3,
Ljubljana, 2000

232. Slavica Janešlieva
(1973, Skopje)
Love and Interest
2 photographs by Stanko
Nedelkovski, 50 × 70 cm,
2 metal plates, 2 spoons,
candle with text, 2000,
The Museum of the City
of Skopje





233. Lilia Dragneva
(1975, Chisinau)
Lucia Macari
(1974, Chisinau)
Kinovari (Imitatzia)
exhibition overview, 2001
photograph by Oleg Caneev



Clockwise from top:

234. **subREAL** (1995, Bucharest and Amsterdam):
Călin Dan (1955, Arad),
Iosif Király (1957, Resita)
Interviewing the Cities
(Framing)
 b/w photograph,
 Bucharest, 2002



235. **Flutura Haxhillari**
 (1970, Shkodra), **Besnik
 Haxhillari** (1966, Pogradec)
Wounds and Perfume
 performance, 2001



236. **Maja Bajević** (1967, Sarajevo), **Emanuel Licha**
 (1971, Montreal)
Green Green Grass of Home
 video, 17 min, drawing,
 photographs, 2002



237. Yevgeny Yufit
(1961, Leningrad)
still from *Killed by the Lighting*
film, 2002

238. Mark Verlan
(1963, Cocieri)
*The Prince of the Kingdom
of Moldova*
2002, 29 × 42 cm,
photograph by Oleg Caneev



239. Eclipse (1999)

(anonymous group, both members born in 1976, Slovenia)

Blood Is Sweeter Than Honey

from the series *Pornorama*

the numbers on the photograph relate to the following artists:

1. Jeff Koons; 2. David Cronenberg; 3. Madonna;
4. Marina Abramović;
5. Chapman Brothers;
6. Richard Clayderman;
7. Jan Saudek; 8. Annie Sprinkle; 9. Helmut Newton;
10. Ron Athey; 11. Pedro Almodovar

digital print, 2001

photograph by Rajko Bizjak



240. Teodor Graur
(1953, Pogaceaua)
Culture N° 4, 2004
collage, oil paint on plastic,
photograph, 120 cm x 120 cm



241. Pavel Brăila
(1971, Chisinau)
Barons' Hill
Soroca, 2004, video
installation, photograph
by Vladislav Hancu



Sislej Xhafa 'Cuisine' 2005 detail

Cuisine

area esterna ai Giardini

Vernissage 9-11 June 2005
12 June-6 November 2005

Saturday, June 11th, from 10 pm on...
at Campo Bandiera e Moro

Commissioner Andi Tepelena, Cecilia
Tirelli

<http://www.mkqjr-ks.org/venice2005>
venice2005@mkqjr-ks.org
377 44 116 896, 381 38 544 472

One of Kosova's most exciting artists, Sislej Xhafa, will represent Kosova at the 2005 Venice Biennale.

The exhibition in the Kosovar Pavilion will be a personal investigation of themes at the heart of Xhafa's art.

While understanding that contemporary art is in a permanent state of rebellion against deceiving concepts and ideologies, Sislej Xhafa builds up a special strategy to rebel and challenge the modern age society which is attempting to corrupt art by embroiling it under the trail of consumerism and pleasure, and under the control of the god of all gods—profit.

Starting even from his early works, Xhafa uses the prejudiced image of "the other"—the bad one and the weak one, the denizen and wanderer, the foreigner who is perceived as a danger to the safety and wellbeing of westerners. Just like the feminist theoreticians and activists, or other groups fighting for the rights of marginalized ethnic and interest groups, who had used the strategy of twisted concepts to raise awareness on the dominating prejudices in their respective societies, even in countries that are considered more democratic and advanced (the prejudices of the machoism, racism, etc), so has the image of the Albanian immigrant (and also Arab and African) in Italy and wider in Europe, been prejudiced as a creature with criminal predispositions—a bad person, a thief, a rapist, backward, perturbing etc. Xhafa uses these prejudiced images to challenge and aggravate racist concepts—concepts for which the majority is not so conscious about.

242. **Ştefan Rusu**
(1964, Caiet)
Frunze/Green Territories,
map, 1,5m x 1 m, 2004

243. **Albert Heta**
(1974, Prishtina)
Kosovar Pavillion
event, 2005

Introduction to Part I

Lívia Páldi

In 2002 I was invited by IRWIN to edit and prepare texts commissioned for a special edition of *New Moment* magazine (produced in collaboration with *New Moment* in the same year and which was accompanied by a CD-ROM co-produced with Renderspace-Pristop Interactive). These texts now form the basis for the opening chapter of this book.

At the time of writing, with further contributions anticipated, this chapter consists of twenty-three texts that reflect in their style and concept rather different attitudes and points of view on art from Eastern Europe.

Each contributor made their own decision as to what approach she/he would take to selecting artists or works from nation to nation for inclusion in this publication. As such the resulting texts vary significantly. In some cases (Latvia and Lithuania) there is a compilation of excerpts from previously published texts by various authors introduced with a chronology of historical or artistic events, while in other cases (Bosnia-Herzegovina or Hungary) the authors have provided a more detailed introduction to the artistic context of their country, helping to navigate the reader through the selected artists or works. For some contributors the commission was a means to support the development of ongoing research (as in the case of Viktor Misiano's oral history project, where the texts are based on the transcripts of interviews) or an elaboration of their academic research in the form of an essay (Ana Peraica, Branislav Dimitrijević, Jana and Jiří Ševčík). Some writers have elaborated on specific works and/or artistic production and give a more detailed account (Călin Dan), while others prefer a lexicon-format employing a more evaluative method (Miško Šuvaković). Most follow certain traditions of art historical writing while in the case of Albania and Kosova (Edi Muka), the project has resulted in the production of one of the first overviews of contemporary art produced in this particular region, with an attempt to provide a historical context, as well as take a step towards the establishment of an official written art history.

The standardisation of the texts was widely discussed but later turned out to be unfeasible. In all texts further information was added when it was felt necessary though only in relation to the particular selection of artists.

For some readers the texts may read as a reassessment of artists and projects that have become better known, especially in the last decade. But we hope that even they will find surprising connections and parallels, as well as oeuvres and production hardly ever discussed beyond the local/national context.

A special acknowledgment of my gratitude goes to Rawley Grau for his help and insightful suggestions in editing many of these texts.

Albanian Socialist Realism or the Theology of Power

Edi Muka

I. Albanian Socialist Realism or the Theology of Power 1945-1990

Before World War II and the appearance of communism on the political scene, Albania was a small, very poor, rural country, obviously peripheral to any major political or strategic interests. Freed from the Ottoman Empire only twenty-seven years before being invaded by fascist Italy, there was no time and no intention to try to create a national identity using the traditional pattern of historical values. Of course glimpses of a patriotism deriving from the Albanian Enlightenment period, or references to the famous Skanderbeg time⁴ existed now and then, but the only factor that brought about any unifying element was a resistance to assimilation, especially through language.

The end of World War II found Albania in a chaotic situation in which several political sides were trying to gain control of the country. Obviously the most successful were the communists, as was the case almost everywhere in Europe. In finding virtually empty terrain, they were the only ones to develop a ready-made identity for the Albanian people. This started to spread from their messengers, known as the commissars, or people theoretically supposed to build a new society. The problem was that from the beginning, and throughout their tenure of power, their entire societal structure was virtual, based on 'ideals and ideal grounds' and not on what a nationalistic or patriotic movement might normally have operated. Their point of departure was the politicisation of history under the new ideological framework, using a simple 'cut-and-paste' process.

After forcing their way into power by removing all opponents and opposing forces, their new model of identity, which provided a basis for the mass instrumentalisation that followed, was established.

This model had to bear the standard features acknowledged by the overall ideology, but apparently this was not enough. By following a very strict and cruel line intended to preserve their power, the change of interests they brought into effect brought with it various shifts in the pattern of new identity — that of the 'New Man'. The party claimed this as their biggest achievement. In this Frankenstein's monster, it was possible to recognise everything that a perfect being should be, most of all entirely committed to the party (not even to the country, to which the identity issue is usually related). By following an extreme isolationist policy, separating the entire country from the rest of the world, to the point where people hardly knew where and what Albania was, they built their model on the old mythical cliché of 'the small one attacked by the Other'.

The task of precisely defining the qualities and characteristics of the *homo socialismi* derives from the accentuated social functions of socialist realist art, or as Gëzim Qendro has defined it, 'the theology of power'. This was an art of profound educational character that was required to translate the ethics of communism into artistic form; an art which had to be a plastic expression of the moral values of communism, and — in a phenomenon common within the art of autocratic societies — an art that created defined models that were later turned into obligatory ones that had to be followed by all. The mandatory integration on all levels and activities of life, the irreconcilability, the exclusion of every possibility for dialogue, the readiness to defend even with one's life the ideal in which one believes, the anonymity, the unflinching faith in the truth and right of Marxist-Leninist philosophy and in the infallibility of the leader, the stoicism, the rigour and earnestness (it was difficult to find any Epicurean

character or somebody who smiles among them), these among other things are the characteristics of homo socialismi, of the model to be followed. This narcissistic element is very much present in the communist legacy and it is one of the driving forces that has shaped the new Albanian identity. Vanity, ethnocentrism and radicalism are some elements on which this mentality is based.

Through the centuries the popular and collective mind created the myth of the hero — almost always on the side of the defenceless — who wages an unequal war against an enemy that in the folk tradition was conceived as a mythological figure, inhuman and enormously powerful, an evil giant who comes from the sea and wreaks havoc. The hero, who in the folk poems has different names and is conceived as a mythological figure himself, is depicted as a strong and dauntless hero, fighting and sacrificing himself in the name of a community that's always waging an unequal war, always winning the battle after a terrible fight and, in some cases even after he was killed. The moral of the songs told us that the hero loses everything but his honour. This narcissistic element, which is not difficult to discover in this reflection of our image, is essential to traditional collective memory and to the formation of the national self-image.

Thus, the new form of collective narcissism, this time enhanced by ideology, spread from a powerful propaganda machine, which didn't totally destroy the archaic and narcissistic image that the Albanians had of themselves, but added some new elements. In such fertile ground the seeds of the new, ideal self-image were planted without difficulty, but this time based on well-defined objectives and strategies. To the cult of the hero defending the motherland there was added the cult of the hero of collective work. Although the same terms were not used, mainly because the balance had shifted from folk art to academic and official art, once again we find this element of narcissism strongly present. In the predominant veneration of the leader, who sometimes had the moral qualities of the heroes of the legends, we again find this narcissistic element.

Narcissism seems to be a metaphor for the human condition, a state of mind in which the world appears as a mirror of the self, either collective or individual. The collective mind during the communist period reflects the needs of the group as a whole and not the psychic or psychological needs of the individual. These have to be subordinated to the demands of the community.

This oppression/suppression defined, in a very strict manner, the way in which the visual arts were to develop as part of state propaganda for almost half a century during which the communists were in power in Albania. As described above, with no possibilities whatsoever to have connections to, and information about, the wider world (and about what was happening in the arts), there was no opportunity to have any important individual or movement in the Albanian art context capable of marking some sort of change or signifying a break. As the cruelty of the regime towards any thought that dared to be different had seized hold of every aspect of both the individual and society, the situation totally excluded the possibility of an alternative or underground movement in the arts, since such a thing would have meant an immediate prison sentence. Still, in the visual arts some noticeable shifts occurred that are totally insignificant in the wider context of art history but which had some relevance internally. These were mostly related to formal approaches. Such changes are marked by the arrival on the scene of artists who had received different art education, but always within the frame of socialist realism and only in the field of very traditional artistic media, i.e. painting and sculpture.

The beginning of the 1970s brought a ray of hope for a serious change in the political orientation of the most isolated communist country. This sort of movement was especially evident in art and culture, which was influencing the entire Albanian way of life with a tendency towards openness to Western cultural experience, as represented mostly by an Italian influence. The state allowed the reception and even the uninterrupted transmission of Italian television; some local TV shows were modelled according to western standards; music started to show some of the same pop influences as European music, and the same thing started to happen in the visual arts.

Abdurrahim Buza

(b. 1905 Gjakova, Kosova — d. 1986 Tirana)

fig. 88

In spite of the fact that the influence of Abdurrahim Buza couldn't be established within the art scene, he was an artist of particular importance since his work hadn't been influenced by the ideological scheme and was to a certain extent tolerated. Buza attended the Academy of Fine Arts in Florence in the late 1930s and arrived on the Albanian art scene at a time when the

fragile dialogue that had begun with the Western tradition of painting was interrupted to direct it towards the ideological channels of socialist realism.

By the end of the 1900s, Albanian painting had already experienced the first examples of an art that sought a way out of the Byzantine and Neo-Byzantine tradition by trying to adopt a new language, closer to the movements and tradition of European painting. In the early 1930s Albanian painting was enriched with a delicate sensibility towards the use of colour and object representation, bringing it closer to the model of French impressionism.

In this context, Buza's painting shows an unusual attention to colour, conceived as an autonomous reality, together with a new position on perspective and a reconsideration of drawing as a formal element, connected more to a graphic richness than a depiction of objects. The motif that made Buza's work acceptable within the hard ideological line of socialist realism was a special attention to folklore, even if this was with an almost naïve consideration of reality. It was precisely the folkloristic and historical themes that kept the author safe from the danger of punishment for 'distortion of the marvellous socialist reality', the depiction of which was considered the main goal of Albanian art.

Danish Jukniu

(b. 1934 Shkodra — d. 2000 Shkodra)

fig. 43

Another important moment in the otherwise dull history of Albanian socialist realism is connected to Danish Jukniu, who introduced emancipatory elements within the monotonous flow of political art. He is one of the rare examples in which the painting scene in Albania, forced as it was to develop under the iron curtain against every influence from capitalist and revisionist culture, occasionally breathes an accidental breath of fresh air. In this case Jukniu focused mainly on the formal aspects of painting. Having studied in Poland, Jukniu introduced into the stiff Albanian art scene an elegant form structured according to classical models. At the same time he was attentive to the formal richness of Italian primitivists of the 1400s, such as Beato Angelico, Piero della Francesca, etc. — to the geometrical de-fragmentation of Cézanne's images, as well as the warmth and simplicity of Morandi, to a more advanced example of formal structure according to cubist influences. The piece that made the most

impact and influenced an entire generation of younger artists from the 1970s was *Working for the Light* 1969. Jukniu could be regarded as the first artist to elegantly avoid the engaging pathos that existed in socialist realist painting in Albania. He was able to make room for formal research that, considered within its sterility, offered examples of mannerism that in the development of art in 1980s Albania would pave the way for larger developments among other artists trying to avoid the socialist realist model.

Edison Gjergo

(b. 1939 Tirana — d. 1989 Tirana)

fig. 71

Another important artist closely connected to the only liberal moments in socialist Albanian culture — from 1970–3 — is Edison Gjergo. Among the small group of artists that tried to introduce a different way of thinking, one representing what might have been an open effort to abandon the strict ideology of socialist realism, always through formal research, Gjergo is the most tragic figure — a victim of the cruel reaction that his ground-breaking painting raised.

Edison Gjergo's *The Epic of the Morning Stars* 1972, would become not only the protagonist of this new hope, but also the most tragic example of the delusion that followed. This work, together with that of a few others, Edi Hila amongst them, represented the best examples of new developments in painting in Albania. Almost immediately it would end up in darkness, doomed as an example of the worst 'influence of degenerated capitalist ideology', marking the quick and tragic end of the life of an artist who tried to be different.²

II. The Time of Ironic Optimism — Albanian Art After the 1990s

The fall of the Iron Curtain brought to an end the forced development of ideological art in the countries of the communist block, among which Albania was the last to break free. Alongside social and political changes aesthetic paradigms have also changed, as well as the approach of artists to their production. The globalisation in culture was underway several years before the outburst of new media, which is now present in every contemporary art form. These changes resulted in a new process of involvement. This was

supported both by the growing interest of western cultural circles and institutions in the art production of marginal and peripheral areas and the art movements or individuals that were emerging from these areas and their intermingling of local references, all of which was reinforced by existing cultural differences.

Together with the above shift the 1990s brought about a large degree of Westernisation of Albanian culture and its art forms. At this point we can witness the clash created as a consequence of the dissolution of inherent local references within the global patterns, especially when considering arts and culture. The great promises of technological development offering a new level of equality, shared space and thoughts, prove to be almost accidental when it comes to the real and physical exchange between peoples and cultures. Many of the countries of Eastern Europe, aspiring to join the European Union, are still far from fulfilling certain dubious standards, required to join, from the perspective of an integrated global market economy. While showing important developments most have operated using parallel forms and systems for everything.

Indeed aesthetic and cultural production is currently displaying interesting new features which in my opinion are based, on the one hand, on local references and not on their dissolution, and on the other on hybrid forms coming from the cultural mixes in the centres of power. It's precisely these local references that give sense to the development of artistic trends. Therefore territory, or transported cultural background, becomes important. Cultural potential considered in terms other than nationalism, fundamentalism or ethnicity can become a determinant for the redefinition of local references in the new conditions set by changing aesthetic paradigms or technological advances. This might be the case even with the technological boom and the promise of a new future, which seen in a historical context is nothing but a cyclical repetition of the twentieth century, that in art forms seems to have materialised as a trend for remix.

It is for this reason that interest in the above-mentioned marginal or emerging cultures is heightened. Greater diversity is generated and different cultural products are conceived. This not only helps the marginal cultures and post-communist countries of the former East, but also, assists the conquering system of the West to redefine itself and try to find a way forward. Under these weird conditions of a

thorough 'depoliticization of economy' (Žižek), a return to real politics — free from the dictates of the global economy — is needed in order to create the possibility of confrontation with a system capable of swallowing up and integrating even the most hardcore opposition. Culture seems to be some sort of way out of this stagnation and is perhaps the only means to create a challenging platform. In a situation where the economic rules are leading towards a forced unification for all, it is only through decisive cultural action that we can get to know, understand and consider diversity.

What is happening in today's Albania, and how do Albanian artists respond to such a situation? What are the main issues that define everyday life? What are the social phenomena that have shaped society in the last ten years of change, from the most obscure application of totalitarianism to a primitive uncontrolled market economy? And last but not least, how do Albanian artists react to this situation, and what is their work about?

Until the late 1990s Albania ran the risk of turning into nothing else but a site of continuous migration, a lost land existing under some 'wild west' set of rules. Indeed, Albania represented a point of no return in the great escape towards the Western European myth, living its tragedy of distance; being close to everything and everybody while at the same time unable to be part of anything, relying only on the image of a future which would never happen. Reflecting the tragedy of the duality of distance, while trying to escape from it, the hybrid mix of feelings, of hope and frustration, produced an ironic optimism, which permeated culture and art and seemed the only way out of the anxiety of history.

Being an artist in Albania means coming to terms with Utopia or with a future that never comes. Albanian artists have refused the myth of progress, which was central to the aesthetics of socialist realism, and have learned to corrode the surface of their reality with the acid of irony and nonsense. All the young Albanian artists who have marked the new trail of contemporary Albanian art at the end of the 1990s respond to the situation according to their personal strategies: having experienced migration — most of them no longer live in the country — and the fall of political and social power, they could never go back to a unitary movement. It's in the variety of media, of stylistic and emotional tones that the richness of Albanian art in the wider context of the art world can

be found. This research promotes neither a movement, nor a generational manifesto, but aspires to show the variety and fragmentation of a current situation that is still changing.

Contemporary Albanian art doesn't provide a thesis, for it works on a hypothesis of subjectivity and diversity, which defy the stereotypes of a new art from a marginal and peripheral culture, as a politically correct observer might put it. New Albanian contemporary art dwells in the distance between empathy and the cold glance of documentation. Albanian artists have turned fragmentation and heterogeneity into a form of strength and subversion. Their strategies are as precarious as our situation in the face of history.

Adrian Paci

(b. 1969 Shkodra. Lives and works in Milan.)

fig. 212

Adrian Paci made his way into the contemporary European art scene with works that were very much based on a narrative dealing with pressing social problems. His first video work, *Albanian Stories* 1997, marked his entry into the group of young Albanian contemporary artists first presented as part of *Permanent Instability*, an international group show organised in Tirana in 1998. The work begins with a very simple story, a tale to be more precise, but it is not one of those legends from which one can trace the epistemological or semiotic developments of certain regions or tribes. This rather funny tale with no beginning and no end is told by the artist's young daughter. The intimate and often incomprehensible way she is muttering the story of her troubled country while putting her dolls asleep, reveals a strikingly different view from that constructed by the international media through reportage. The tale is about the atrocities that had happened in their hometown Shkodra in 1997 and which made the family leave for Italy.

What made Paci decide to record these tales through the detached medium of a video camera was the amazing mixing of characters (the rooster and the cow) with words his daughter picked up from the news (obscure and multinational forces, etc.). Even though this was the artist's first experience with the medium of video, the piece is incredibly powerful and fills the viewer first with the curiosity raised by the close-up of the child's curly hair and then by the tale

and the way she tells it. According to Paci he was so shocked by the story that the only thing he could do was 'to shoot it through an indifferent and cold medium, such as the video camera'. Thus he introduced it as a piece of work where his role as an artist was 'minimal, almost comparable to a ready-made act, just taking something alien and putting it into the context of art'.³

This experience opened Paci's artistic work up to new research. His second video, *A Real Game* 1999, was almost an extension of the first one, some sort of an 'intertext' in which the story was retold. As in the previous work the narrative was still very important addressing one of the most pressing problems of our times, that of immigration, preventing the viewer from passing by indifferently. His next piece, *Believe me, I am an artist* 2001, shows a new level of maturity. This is the first work in which both text and narrative are of less importance. Paci deconstructs the narration by staging a real life event. Even though the question of immigration comes up again, the work has a much broader approach dealing with the different conditions of ephemeral experience: surveillance systems; the artist's new position as an immigrant; confrontation with the system and its structures; the lack of dialogue between the immigrant/artist and the institution/public; the existence of fixed conventions on which the relationship between immigrants and institutions are built. The video is also presented with a series of photographs that served as a fact file for an interrogation process the artist had to go through.⁴

With the next video, *Apparition* 2000, which was presented at *In and Out*, an international show held in Tirana in December 2000, the artist was awarded the Onufri Prize and reached a peak in his artistic career. This work is a continuation of the artist's research into his new position as a displaced person. Entering the exhibition space we suddenly hear the voice of a little girl, singing with childish coquetry an old Shkodra children's song. In the projection square a little girl of about four years old appears, her round face surrounded by curly hair, reminiscent of the angelic figures of the Italian Renaissance. She sings: 'O moj deelja, delja rude, oo moj deelja, delja rude.' After finishing the first verses of the song, the little girl leans forward staring down at the wall in front of her. Suddenly as if under the command of an invisible director a group of elderly people start to sing the rest of the song: 'A s'ma fal nji qingj te bute, bee bej amaan ...' and then immediately fall silent gazing up

to the wall in front of them. After the first emotional impact, this video piece offers more, and raises essential questions about the relationships that exist as the basis of social and political transformations in post-communist Albania. For the group of elderly people, the song of 'hairy ship and little lamb', is more than just a song, it is almost an anthem, part of their identity and culture related to memories of the past. It's a sort of code that helps them to understand the culture they come from and to which they belong. But what can we say in the case of the small daughter? What can she do with this song and to what extent will it be part of her culture and education? Moreover, what will the role and importance of her country's cultural tradition in a wider context be for her? The distance between the two projected images, or to put it another way, the void between them becomes a relevant signifier, far more important than the images themselves. This is because the space suggests the unavoidable, ever increasing distance between the little girl and her grandparents. The only common link (in addition to their blood connection) can be traced in the sound track that is the same, passing from one image to the other. But for how long will this be the case? After several years, many of the chairs on the wall in front of her will inevitably be empty. After more years, she will find herself sat in one of those chairs, waiting impatiently for the appearance of her younger self. What song will she sing then?

Adrian Paci addresses several contemporary issues in a rather delicate way, presenting them from an unusual postmodern cultural background. This is very much related to ephemeral events in Albania that either pass by unnoticed, or which are perceived according to a certain set of conventions, upon which nobody seems to reflect. Therefore we should think of Paci's work as a call to consciousness and reflection.

Anri Sala

(b. 1974 Tirana. Lives and works in Berlin.)

fig. 208

A subtle mistrust of reality and fiction seems to pervade all the videos and films of Anri Sala. Having moved to Paris in 1997 Sala belongs to a generation of young artists that received their education in Albania after the political changes: a generation that grew up in a communist country and, suddenly, had to experience the trauma of capitalism without enjoying

its advantages. From this ideological schizophrenia, Sala has learnt to push the language of documentary to its limits, working on the borders between reality and absurdity. This development can be traced first through his loss of interest in painting and his research into video since his student days. His first film following his diploma work,⁵ *Intervista* — *Finding the Words* 1997 marked one of the most important moments for Albanian contemporary art as well as a new approach to short film. It is an exercise in interpretation, an effort to bridge the distance between past and present, a story that unravels in a multiplicity of gazes neutralising the sense of objectivity traditionally associated with documentaries.

His next short film *Nocturnes* 1999 follows the same reflective line. The body of the work is again built on a story, but it is not defined by the narrative as is the case with *Intervista*. The video camera itself works in a new way, being part of story-creation process, witnessing a higher professional maturity from the artist. The story is a metaphor of the Balkan situation, but there is nothing told directly by any of the characters. By avoiding simply telling a story, which would make the work a mere documentation of what has happened in the characters' life, Sala breaks the linearity by fragmenting the parallel narratives.

It seems that there is a very subtle interconnecting line between some of the principal video works of Anri Sala, like *Intervista*, *Nocturnes*, *Promises* 2001, *The Missing Landscape* 2001, or even *Uomoduomo* 2000. They all reveal something about fatality and irreversibility. Almost all of them speak about similar situations or common responsibilities, and their long-term social impact, or the way in which such actions have affected our lives.

The main character of *Uomoduomo* is not only a perfect representation of old age/ageing, but he embodies a condition of fatality reflected in the entire structure of the piece. On the other hand, he is filmed in the fatalistic context of the cathedral where the presence of the man defines the nature of the space. This is what we see being performed in the sequences of Sala's film: changes in the sense of belonging and context of the space depicted in the video by tracing just a few minutes in the life of a homeless man. And he goes further in this direction, titling the work *Uomoduomo*, thus blurring the borderline of belonging between the subject and the space; here one can no longer distinguish if it's the man that belongs to the space or vice versa. Through this operation he

changes the dimensions of the space, bringing it to a very human level. Thus the space becomes some sort of shelter for the old man, the only secure place where no-one can disturb his sleep, not because they care about him, but because they care about the space and what it implies.

Edi Hila

(b. 1949 Shkodra. Lives and works in Tirana.)

fig. 217

Many of Edi Hila's works that look apparently like architectural kitsch, or imaginary architecture, were indeed inspired and painted from real landscapes. Hanging *Untitled Landscapes* 1999–2000, on white gallery walls creates the illusion of windows with a view to some strange landscape with impossible structures.

By painting landscapes without a human presence and by focusing on the unfinished structure of buildings, Hila bears witness to a typical feature of contemporary Albanian society: its transitional status. None of these architectural sites speaks of a clear functional logic. Rather they are based on a 'here and now' necessity of existence, where the next day can bring either the building's extension or its disappearance.

The series *Untitled Landscapes* is not a mere documentation, but also an ironic approach to the aesthetics of kitsch. By reducing pictorial skills in favour of a photographic likeness, the artist gives maximum space to the absurd interpretation each object offers. It seems as if each of these buildings might hide a personal story (similar to a thriller), that arouses the viewer's curiosity to explore it, while always being accompanied by a hermetic sensation transmitted to us by the images. Works like *Comfort (Self-Portrait)* 2000, follow a different theme, in which Hila continues his representation of the void. He places the central figure of the painting — Hila himself — within a flower-patterned rubber swimming pool for children — surrounding himself with a dark (almost monochrome black) background. Thus he stresses the absurdity and sadness of a petite bourgeois gesture of luxury compressing what one dreams about and what one really experiences in everyday life.

Hila's work doesn't fit with the saturated images of mass culture, comics and digital landscapes, a trend recently gaining dominance in Albanian culture. Neither does it have much to do with any pictorial Albanian tradition, since in today's Albanian painting

there isn't much of a tradition at all, but a chaotic situation, stuck in the past. His paintings are a reflection of distorted influences exactly as they are perceived and transfigured in Albanian reality — but he is still more concerned with what is missing. Coming from a background in painting and still faithful to the medium, Hila can be considered as the artist who bridges the enormous gap between what went on before and what is going on now in Albanian contemporary art.

Alban Hajdinaj

(b. 1974 Tirana. Lives and works in Tirana.)

fig. 200

There are two obvious sets of conventions that relate to our perception of kitsch in artistic and cultural production: one is the Greenbergian high modernist definition of kitsch as opposed to the avant-garde — therefore a negative one — the other is the postmodern perception of the phenomenon through its ephemeral, consumerist character — a positive one. However, both perceptions are based on the same presumptions that define the nature of the phenomenon in its own way, namely, the search for a cultural identity prompted by the development of capitalist society at its very beginning.

One might wonder if it is possible to apply this phenomenon in a developing society such as Albania, one that is still far from being capitalist and that represents a totally non-established value system. But on the other hand the strong creative energies and their synergy with the almost present postmodern prerogatives, creates a new context for the artistic and cultural production of this territory. The work of the young Albanian artist, Alban Hajdinaj has been influenced by this condition. In one of his early installations *Untitled* 1997 — for which he was awarded first prize at the international prize Onufri in 1998 — he used life-sized body casts lying on the floor. These were half-wrapped in silk cloth and enclosed in ammunition cases, fitting the size of the bodies. Reminding viewers of standard coffins, this work stirred up strong and rather mixed emotions in its representation of death.

In subsequent years the work of Hajdinaj has taken a very interesting twist. There is a shift of interest that gives shape to a new aesthetic representation in his work, showing a new level of professional maturity. *Still Life* 1999 initially appears to

be rather different from his previous work but reveals a subtle connection to earlier pieces in his delicate mixing of kitsch and violence. The viewer looks at bouquets of artificial flowers in flower-patterned china vases, with flower-patterned drapery in the background that according to the artist is: 'a whole artificial world in content, pretending to be romantic and picturesque in appearance. It is not the high technology virtual world, it is the poor, ruined society's populist culture.' Indeed it is here that Hajdinaj's work takes on a full postmodern dimension. Through setting up a reality representing the average cultural taste, the artist deconstructs the real side of ephemeral life. His goal is not achieved through the depiction of the very means of popular taste; nor by direct references as in the previous works. He does it by shifting attention to the kitschy objects, alienated, but totally inseparable from everyday existence, underlining hidden aspects that the artist advances with subtle irony in his subsequent works *Salad Bowl* 1999 and *Triptych* 2000.

Erzen Shkololli

(b. 1976 Peja, Kosova. Lives and works in Peja.)

fig. 221

Erzen Shkololli — one of the youngest and most interesting artists active in Kosova — works with local rituals and folklore and acts as a sort of instinctive and biased anthropologist re-enacting traditional ceremonies, while insinuating contemporary symbols and disillusion. It is this lingering between past and present that makes Shkololli's art a typical example of what it means to work in the Balkans today — lost between tradition and modernity, remembrance and hope, freedom and death.

His pieces are composed with figurative motifs, designed in various fabrics (cloth, wool, velvet, pieces of national clothing, flags) and compiled in a collaged patchwork. Working on his inquiry of Albanian tradition, rituals and folklore Shkololli moves the symbols from their natural setting into the contemporary art context. His installation *The Bed* 2000, which won him the 52nd Michetti Prize in Italy, is a mortuary bed where his obsession with death reaches a paroxysm. In his earlier works, there is an emphasis on death and its rituals, either teasing the popular attitude towards it, or using its symbolic rituals as metaphors for the atrocities that took place in Kosova in 1999.

His other key project to date, *The Bride* 2000, deals with the wedding ceremony, using a traditional white wedding gown, a veil covering the bride's face and the diadem over the veil. The crowning of the mysterious bride with Kosova's post-war reality, produces an effect of surreal strangeness.

Albanian Flag on the Moon 1999, reveals the artist's sharp irony with another kind of obsession. Caught between nationalist claims and international perplexity concerning the precarious and indefinite status of his homeland, Kosova, the artist has been pushed to create this funny, almost absurd work: the moment of placing the Albanian national flag on the moon. With the help of Photoshop, Shkololli interweaves different perspectives and concepts of the quest for identity.

Sislej Xhafa

(b. 1970 Peja, Kosova. Lives and works in San Giuliano Terme, Italy and New York.)

fig. 230

The stereotype of Albania as a land of abuse, violence and criminals is reflected in the work of Sislej Xhafa, who has become one of the most established Albanian artists. With his move to Italy, Xhafa began to find his way through the contemporary art scene. As his work relies on a continuous friction between cultures, and requires conflicts and negotiations, Xhafa decided to move to New York and again became a stranger. It is difficult to identify one work that represents the breakthrough moment for Xhafa, because in fact, his art has become like an exercise in turning weaknesses into strengths — he draws on the imagined controversiality associated with his culture, in order to compose a portrait of the artist as clandestine. His interventions are carried out with the violence of a criminal act, mixing cheap and expensive materials. It is possible to stumble into one of his performances without even noticing. This is what happened to some tourists and commuters at the train station in Ljubljana, where the artist, perfectly dressed up in a black suit, improvised a stock exchange auction in front of the billboard that usually announces the departures and the arrivals of trains. Caught in his own stock exchange frenzy, Xhafa treated people and trains as nothing but shares, numbers, statistics, turning his performance into a sarcastic comment on the burden of bureaucracy, with all its mathematical precision and visas, special permissions and procedures.⁶

Bureaucracy is the target of another public installation by Xhafa, built in Ghent on the occasion of the exhibition *Over the Edges* (SMAK, 2000), where he transformed the lobby of the local police station into a first class hotel, bringing in carpets, couches, crystal lamps, liqueurs and giant Louis XIV mirrors, with classical music playing in the background. In this 'purgatory de luxe' criminals and clandestine immigrants were given a last chance to experience a cheap mirage of wealth and success, before being taken away to prison or sent back to their homeland.

In his solo show *Hooligans in Heaven* (Galleria Laura Pecci, Milan 2001) the artist constructed walls and barriers, upsetting the rules and the politics of the art world. Curators, gallerists and art critics had to step into a dark and narrow corridor, lit only by a few chinks through which a small, partial view of the work was given and where above a Persian rug hung a photo of the anonymous Albanian UCK (Kosovo Liberation Army) commander Johnny that has been embellished for this installation with a triple gold leaf frame hung in the middle of a large red wall. At the same time artists were invited into a big space where they could spend some relaxing moments in contemplation of a series of almost pornographic drawings that ran like a long banner along the walls of this second room. In the centre was the conference-room of the hooligans, furnished with a large glass table, mirrors, plants, and Xhafa's latest video *Hooligans in Heaven*. This showed three Albanian boys running along the track of a sporting arena in Milan toting a tree trunk.

As a consummate clandestine, Xhafa moves easily between different contexts, mixing different media and styles that all become part of his complex and often vast installations, or which are used in a more discrete way, verging on the invisible when the artist decides to disappear and mingle with reality.

Flutura and Besnik Haxhillari

(Flutura Haxhillari, b. 1970 Shkodra. Besnik Haxhillari, b. 1960 Pogradec. Live and work in Berlin) fig. 235

For several years Flutura and Besnik Haxhillari's work has been well defined and recognisable through certain features. From the start the Haxhillaris focussed on performance and working with the body. This has become a central tool of their practice that has been explored as well as exploited in various ways

and which is very much based on their everyday experiences. After leaving Albania in 1997, the Haxhillaris settled in Berlin, where an important part of their work was developed. Being an inseparable family (the two artists and their child), they carried the entire trauma and consequences of this move together. Far from their homeland as well as far from being established abroad, the artists found shelter in their new identity calling themselves The Gullivers, thus identifying with the well-known and popular literary character. From the appropriation of this character, and its repositioning in new contexts, a series of works and performances have developed, different in approach, but concerned with similar experiences and related issues about which they speak. The first of the series took place at the National Gallery in Tirana in 1998, where the artists installed themselves on a matrimonial bed, mounted high up on the wall. The piece was entitled *The place where the Gullivers sleep*, and referred to the first visit back to their native land after a year away. It also signalled a new shift towards action and performance in the Haxhillaris' work, opening the way to explore a new dimension in Albanian art.

In another series of performances, made for their solo show *Par Avion*, the colour red with its proverbial and symbolic content dominated. During the performance, the two artists wrapped themselves in a long red cloth performing a mute ritual. Then they stripped off the cloth and in their red underwear lit a fire that burnt the strips of cloth recalling not only the Albanian flag but, more generally, the inflammable Balkan territory. This performance was an introduction to a series of snapshots where the artists portrayed themselves sleeping in curious poses photographed against a red blanket hung on the wall. In their recent works they focus on the social position of the immigrant. Being a family constantly on the move — and having accepted this situation — the Haxhillaris started to concentrate more on the relationship between their physical bodies and the different contexts in which these bodies operate. In *Wounds and Perfume* 2001, they created an interactive installation. They shaved their bodies so as to abandon their known physical identity and stuck small red flowers made from fur all over their bodies, thus reflecting on the borderline between a human and animal body. A dinner table was installed in the middle of the space, covered with different kinds of raw meat, while on a plexiglas screen, mounted on the table, a projection

showed the artists in their known physical shape both of them chewing with empty mouths. Suddenly the real artists started to cut the screen, where their alter-ego mouths were shown, and started to feed on meat from the table.

- 1 Skanderbeg (b.circa 1404 – d.1468), Albanian national hero. His original name was George Castriota or Kastriotës, but the Ottomans called him Iskender Bey, and this was corrupted into Skanderbeg.
- 2 Gjergo was sentenced and was only released from jail at the end of the 1980s. He died of a heart attack as a result of deep depression and alcoholism.
- 3 Artist's comment.
- 4 Paci was interrogated by the Italian police on suspicion of child abuse. He had taken some photos of his daughters with the EXIT stamp (received at the airport) painted on their shoulders.
- 5 *The Tongue* 1996, 26 min
- 6 During *Manifesta 3* in 2000.



From left to right and top to bottom:

- Abdurrahim Buza *Fighters* 1976
 Danish Jukniu *Working for the Light* 1969
 Edison Gjergo *The Epic of the Morning Stars* 1972
 Adrian Paci *Apparition/Shfaqja* 1999–2000
 Anri Sala *Intervista — Finding the Words* 1998
 Edi Hila *Landscape 01* 1999–2000
 Alban Hajdinaj *Chinese Flowers from Albania* 1999
 Erzen Shkololli *Bed* 2000
 Sislej Xhafa *Stock Exchange* 2000
 Flutura and Besnik Haxhillari *Wounds and Perfume* 2001

Burying the Past and Exhuming Mass Graves

Nermina Zildžo

My terror of forgetting is greater than my
terror of having too much to remember.

— Yosef H. Yerushalami, Holocaust survivor¹

For a long time to come, people will associate Bosnia-Herzegovina more with horrendous crimes than with art and culture. And many of us will feel the need not to miss any opportunity to bring these crimes back to memory — the more so because it is still unclear not only how many people were killed and how, but also how this devastation will really affect the country's future cultural life.

The period of war, which the world calls the 'Balkan war', refers to the years between 1992 and 1995. In our country, we simply call it 'the war', without any modifier such as 'first' or 'second' or the like. And although it has no special attribute, no one confuses it with any other war since no previous one matched it in brutality. As to the number of victims, the scale of destruction and the political consequences, this war has more serious consequences for Bosnians than the two World Wars. In this period, Bosnia-Herzegovina also experienced, as never before, the intense presence of the global media. However, this did not help to save the country, but rather marked it as a 'bad' territory, which, as Aida Hozić explains, earned Bosnia-Herzegovina the status of an 'unwanted colony' — a place conquered by the media. '... consumed as an image but rejected as a territory, the ethnic war zone emerges as a new kind of colony — unwanted, undesired, uncalled for — and thus, as a playground for a new type of capitalism.'²

Bosnia-Herzegovina lost its sovereignty with the Dayton Peace Accord in 1995, a fact which is slowly entering public awareness and which politicians (nationalists and democrats alike) still find hard to accept. Aside from that, Bosnia is divided into national

administrative units, which practically legitimises Serbian war gains. Republika Srpska, a state of Bosnian Serbs established by genocide and ethnic cleansing, covers half of the country's territory, the other half being the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, made up of 'united' Bosnians and Bosnian Croats.

In my view, the most fateful events and shifts in Bosnian-Herzegovinan art and culture are actually centred around the war. What I have in mind are: the pre-war period, marked by an art movement called New Primitivis;³ the period of war, characterised by cultural resistance against aggression that mainly took place in besieged Sarajevo; and the post-war period, in which we are witnessing the so-far-unseen internationalisation of the Bosnian scene and a renewed colonisation of the country, torn apart by the war and the peace agreement — the country which, by the irony of fate and the power of weapons, only existed in recent history as an independent state during a few years of war.

The concept of the *East Art Map* project deals with major shifts in the visual arts after World War II. But the first few decades of this post-World War II period (from the 1950s to 1980s) in Bosnia-Herzegovina were characterised mainly by efforts to introduce contemporary art and to develop the necessary infrastructure to support its functioning galleries, the academy of fine arts, and so on, while art events were systematised through sequencing or adding links to the art historical chain of development typical of that time. The way in which young art historians organised and treated art phenomena at the beginning of the 1980s represented a break with the practice of making artistic stylistic sequences, but was still derived from the same conservative institution, the Art Gallery of Bosnia-Herzegovina, simply because this was the

only institution with continuity in employing art historians. In our economic and cultural circumstances, the work of those few art historians represented, and still represents, pioneering research. For this reason, a brief summary of their activities is included in this text.

Bosnia-Herzegovina still has no complete Department of Art History and therefore lacks experts educated in their own country who would research, understand and more efficiently promote local art production. The small number of art historians who returned from studies abroad in that period had inadequate knowledge of local production and those rare ones who were oriented towards contemporary art had to struggle, to the point of self-exhaustion, for the establishment and positioning of the profession on the one hand, and to manage the vast amount of material in need of expert attention on the other. Azra Begić, a long-time curator at the Art Gallery of Bosnia-Herzegovina, now retired, published the first periodicals, curated the first large exhibition projects that classified and evaluated the modern art of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and set up some extremely significant retrospective exhibitions showing modern pioneers — Karlo Mijić, Mica Todorović and others. Though in a solitary position, she always resisted pressures from both local leaders and artists who were well-organised and enjoyed political support from the authorities.

The extreme professional isolation and lack of logistical support, coupled with inversely proportional public exposure, placed a huge burden onto art historians. Next in the chronological line of significant experts is the art historian Ibrahim Krzović. He too did pioneering work studying graphic art and architecture and fighting for their equal status alongside other visual art disciplines. According to him, Bosnian graphic art kept pace with global trends to a far greater extent than painting. As an example, he cited the fact that Informel, like some other art phenomena in Bosnia-Herzegovina, mainly manifested itself in graphic art, not in painting as elsewhere in the world. Krzović also showed that in certain periods of the twentieth century, architecture in Bosnia-Herzegovina corresponded to that of the European metropolis in both quality and style. He worked fruitfully on proving how architecture and urban planning, more than any other cultural factors, display the historical layers of Bosnia-Herzegovina's rich cultural heritage and the complex encounters between East and West civilisations that took place there.

Meliha Husedžinović is the individual most responsible for encouraging and implementing abstraction and minimalist tendencies in an environment that was not favourably inclined to either. Husedžinović also contributed to a situation in which many other cities in the former Yugoslavia, besides Sarajevo, became interested in visual art activities in the pre-war provincial town of Banja Luka (the Autumn Salon). For the past few years, she has been the head of the Art Gallery of Bosnia-Herzegovina, steering it with dedication through the dangers of post-war transition.

Tatjana Alvaj came to work at the Art Gallery of Bosnia-Herzegovina in the mid-1980s. With her, I not only shared an interest in new media, but also worked on some — as it looks to me today — turning-point projects, such as the exhibitions Sarajevo's *New Primitiv* 1990 and *Bosnia Seemingly* 1992.

The exhibition of *New Primitiv* was the first truly multimedia project, which both presented and analysed the entire alternative scene of the 1980s — music, literature, visual arts, theatre, film, and so on. The fact that this exhibition was organised by the Art Gallery of Bosnia-Herzegovina also helped this project to establish itself. As Alvaj recalls, this event shook up the institution of the museum and radically changed exhibition audiences — young people were coming in droves. In *New Primitiv*, young Sarajevans found people with whom they could identify because they were 'above all young talented people of urban mentality, which I consider to be the key difference with respect to the generations that preceded them in the visual arts in this city.'⁴

Bosnia Seemingly was, as it later turned out, the last peacetime exhibition in the Art Gallery of Bosnia-Herzegovina. And at the same time it also seems to be the first inspired by the still unclear and intriguing field of visual culture. The exhibition pointed to the political chaos, or better still to the chaotic mass of graphic materials produced for the referendum on Bosnia-Herzegovina's secession from Yugoslavia (referendum slogans, proposals for new state symbols, new money, new politicians). After this show, the Art Gallery provided shelter for refugees who lived there for almost the entire war, while its staff succumbed to the divisions that had brought about the war — some guarded it, some fired at it, and some were neutral and ran away. One guard died and one fireman lost both his hands and legs while putting out a fire on the roof of the gallery during a bombing raid.

The Artists of the Eighties — Café Smart

The establishment of the Academy of Fine Arts in Sarajevo in 1972 (which moved to its own premises in 1976) had a crucial impact on the subversive 1980s, creating a critical mass of artists who studied and stayed to work in their community. Their activity also attracted a new audience ready to consume new art. These changes led to a creative symbiosis with the eclectic 1980s international art scene, creating a dishevelled, live Bosnian-Herzegovinian visual art scene, the most vibrant since the end of World War II. The rejuvenation of government staff, which reduced the Party's traditional austerity, also contributed to the swing in enthusiasm. At the same time, in Bosnia and other parts of Yugoslavia, republican powers were strengthening at the expense of federal ones, which led to a growing concentration on national interests. Young Bosnians, like other young people in Yugoslavia, turned to themselves, to their own cultural heritage and creative powers, as never before. Belgrade and Zagreb gradually ceased to be the only models of inspiration. Simply put, the foundation of this new self-confidence is loosely contained in the (never clearly defined and manifested but omnipresent) attitude of the 1980s in Sarajevo, an attitude which can be summarised in a simple statement: 'All of you around me can be stronger and better than I am, but this no longer concerns me.' But this search for a new identity did not proceed along the path of openly strengthening national self-confidence as it did in the majority of other milieux. Perhaps this need by the younger generation for spiritual emancipation, never before expressed so strongly, can only be paralleled by the energy radiated by members of hip-hop culture, in the sense of self-sufficiency and revolt against cultural marginalisation. If we set out to analyse the 'invisible' links between American hip-hop culture and Sarajevo's New Primitives more seriously and boldly, we would probably find far more connecting points. In terms of the media, the Sarajevo scene had already opened up to the world, so that predominantly American cultural influences did not bypass Bosnia-Herzegovina, which was, with its national variety and tendency to populism, perhaps the most open to them. Zabranjeno Pušenje, a Sarajevo-based music group that preceded New Primitives, sang with sympathy about Zenica, the most notorious prison in Bosnia-Herzegovina, even though they were not felons. The hero-prisoner from their song only later saw his new affirmation, when during the war, jails were hurriedly opened up to release more fighters with

combat experience and perhaps also to make room for new war felons. In the meantime, 'Ameri' or Americans repaid Bosnians for their cultural cooperation, concluding, after drawing a parallel between violence in their ghettoised suburbs and that in Bosnia during the war, that actually they were not too violent: 'War is frequently used as a rhetorical trope in US rap. But Chuck D of Public Enemy invokes the war in Bosnia to contrast the relatively small degree of violence rappers reflect in the ghettos of the USA...' ⁵

Unlike American rebels of the 1980s, Sarajevo's insurgents — a few groups of young musicians, poets and others — were not socially or intellectually marginalised and neither was the street their main place of existence and expression. They found their place for action in the numerous cafés in Sarajevo — be they the humble university cafés like Crvena Galerija and Obala or typical, traditional places — which proudly took the role of democratised cultural centres. One of the cult places was Zvono, a café where an art group with the same name, headed by sculptor Aleksandar Saša Bukvić, was born and operated. At the same time, two young architects, Amir Vuk and Mirko Marić, were redesigning private cafés, which were their first public projects. Vuk successfully continued his work after the war, balancing his creation of café interiors with serious architectural work. Jusuf Hadžifejzović brought the café into the gallery, transforming the gallery space into a functional café during his shows. This work pointed with irony to the gaps which official/élite culture overlooked and which his café tried to bridge. In Sarajevo, cafés were also places where various social skills were exercised in attempts to outsmart Sarajevo's virtuoso waiters. From the point of view of cultural preservation, it was vital for our kids to be café smart, in contrast to their American street smart peers. The 1980s also marked a turning point in dealing with Bosnia's biggest historical and cultural 'mistake' — the acceptance of Islam during centuries of Turkish domination of the Balkans. Bosnian-Herzegovinian Islam, which was, like other religions, pushed into the background in the post-World War II period, began in the 1980s to gradually move from the private into the public sphere. But neither then nor now has any Bosnian or Herzegovinian been very good at dealing with this component of our cultural heritage. New Primitives, their forerunners Nele Karajlić, the front man of the music group Zabranjeno Pušenje, the singer Elvis, the actor Branko Djurić and others were the first to start

dealing publicly with this formative part of our identity (for example, the television comedy series *Top List of Surrealists*). But during the war the reality became so tragic that hardly anyone could laugh at their jokes. It's hard to say whether this humour was denouncing the separatist nationalism of Bosnians or covertly aligning itself with that of Serbia. One of the first controversial sketches from the afore-mentioned television series, 'Pod Muhamedovom Zastavom' ('Under Mohammed's Banner' — the show starts with a scene in which a man lying under a Zastava car is called by someone outside the car: 'Mohaameed!'), I believed, was harmlessly joking about the religious scene. Yet the fact is that many New Primitivists not only continued their careers in Belgrade during the war (Nele Karajlić, Mladen Materić), but also aligned themselves with fascist politics. However, for Bosnians, few did this so shockingly as the film director Emir Kusturica, who supported, and still does, the politics of Slobodan Milošević. These cases not only open up the difficult question of reviewing one's own intellectual positions, as well as blunders, but also produce a feeling of shame because of the deception and our emotional weakness towards — as it later turned out — our executioners. A large number of those who declared themselves New Primitivists and many others who were assigned to the movement are still active in Sarajevo, although with less vigour, since their leader has remained in Belgrade and because tolerance of making jokes at one's own expense has decreased.

Enjoy Sarajevo

The siege of Sarajevo, mass rapes of Muslim women, the atrocities of Mostar and Srebrenica — these were the themes most frequently dealt with by foreign war reporters in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The siege of Sarajevo almost turned into a world-wide live television series or a reality TV show, as we would call it today. At the same time, it was also romanticised by frequent reports about the cultural resistance of Sarajevans. This kind of defence against aggression divided people, just as the front line separated the aggressors from the aggressed. While the majority of intellectuals supported active cultural life and creativity, some of them believed this only anaesthetised the public in the West, from whom help was so desperately awaited.

Books were published, new magazines and radio stations were set up, and exhibitions, concerts, theatre performances and so on were held during the war. And

at the same time, a huge amount of cultural goods were destroyed — exactly how much is still not known, since no agreed and accurate assessments of the damage have yet been made. During the war, the Sarajevo media ventured an estimate that put the portion of cultural heritage destroyed at 90 percent. This gave rise to the question of whether survival was possible at all, given that such a vast amount of material evidence of cultural and national legitimacy had been lost.

Intellectuals considered it vital to show that Bosnians are part of a so-called civilised Europe, that they are the same as all other Westerners, thinking that the West would certainly send help as soon as this was understood. On the other hand, international intellectuals who came to a besieged Sarajevo, thereby really risking their lives, such as Susan Sontag, Bernard-Henry Lévy and many others, worked selflessly to find out what was really going on. They thought that telling the truth, that is, raising awareness of the genocide that was taking place in Bosnia, would bring help. They were writing articles for the best-known magazines in the world, publishing books, making films — in short, they were making appeals for aid in all available ways.

'This is the first of the three European genocides of our century to be tracked by the world press, and documented nightly on TV. There were no reporters in 1915 sending daily stories to the world press from Armenia, and no foreign camera crews in Dachau and Auschwitz. Until the Bosnian genocide, one might have thought — this was indeed the conviction of many of the best reporters there, ... that if the story could be gotten out, the world would do something. The coverage of the genocide in Bosnia has ended that illusion.'⁶

Local artists were either unaffected or stoically adapted. Those who adapted found ways to get on with their business even with the lack of materials they had been used to working with before the war, changing both materials and modes of work — painters began making installations, Edo Numankadić for instance used waste humanitarian aid packaging, the sculptors Mustafa Skopljak and Ante Jurić collected and used broken glass and half-burnt timber, and Alma Suljević worked on the remains of a burnt down tramway. The ruins of the Sutjeska Cinema served as the venue for one of the most successful wartime exhibitions, *Witnesses of Existence*, organised by the Obala Gallery and also shown at the Venice Biennale in 1993.⁷

Photographers were said to be using urine to develop films. Dressed in black tie, Sarajevo symphony

cellist Vedran Smajlović played on the street for hours and hours for the souls of the deceased, the performance was documented by numerous foreign photographers. And thus, the image of the artist became, paradoxically and unprecedented in the history of iconic images of war, the symbol of the siege of Sarajevo. 'With culture against barbarianism' was the motto that gave strength to many to survive the most desperate situations of the war. This also encouraged the plentiful art production in wartime conditions, which, like so many other things in Bosnia-Herzegovina, is still waiting for better times and a chance to be either critically evaluated or risk falling into oblivion.

In my opinion, the most interesting aspects of wartime visual art production are the war posters, being much more challenging, both intellectually and emotionally, than regular visual art. Today, it is becoming clear that photography played an equally significant role, but due to its dispersal around the globe it is still hard to realistically assess its impact. The potential of war posters, on the other hand, was immediately understood, as they were readily accessible, being displayed, unlike photographs, on the streets and other public places. It is interesting to recall that the war poster as the main, or at least a very significant, means of propaganda began its mission with World War I and ended it with World War II, when its role was diminished by the radio — to be reduced to a historical relic with the arrival of television. But at the end of the twentieth century, in a besieged city, a printed or manually written notification once again turned out to be the most reliable way of communicating vital information, such as how to make a shelter in the basement or what to do with the dead when funeral companies do not function. One such notification read: 'If possible, wrap in wet canvas until carried out of the house or yard. Do not keep for more than 24 hours and then, after reliable identification or description, bury in the nearest yard, garden or park at a depth of two metres.' In such circumstances, the need for the outdated information and propaganda medium — the war poster — re-emerged. Many Sarajevo artists met this need with inspiration and patriotism, yet no one did so as wittily, and passionately as Trio, a design group, supported by the Sarajevo Winter Festival.

During the siege of Sarajevo, Trio (immediately before the war, it became a duo consisting of Bojan Hadžihalilović and Dalila Duraković because the

third member, Leila Mulabegović, moved to Switzerland) established itself as the creator of universal messages through which Sarajevo communicated with the world. When there was no other way, they manually made a series of posters and postcards stating 'Greetings from Sarajevo'. Thanks to these greetings, they managed to attract international media attention, such as Sarajevo artists had never previously received. To Trio, and to many other artists, goes the credit that during its siege Sarajevo became a cultural zone as well as a war one. Artists were constantly, and with irony, commenting on the reality of the war, as well as on the nature of the consummation of Sarajevo in the world media. The poster *Enjoy Sarajevo*, with the same slogan printed on a red background imitating Coca-Cola's logo, became at the same time a symbol of Sarajevo's wartime defiance and of postmodernist war propaganda.

Sarajevo museum experts also continued to work in wartime conditions. It is characteristic that they divided into those who testified on the destruction of cultural goods and those who devoted themselves to salvaging them. The former were mainly making lists of destroyed cultural goods and writing appeals for help to the world community. The latter were doing a culturally less prestigious job, actively protecting cultural artefacts and structures. The actor Josip Pejaković, for instance, set up a headquarters for salvaging art goods and people, which moved gallery, museum and library stocks from buildings that had been damaged or found themselves on the front line. Where collections could not be moved, his headquarters provided a 24-hour armed guard. It is particularly important to mention that the most senseless and inappropriate action by museum workers was organised when the bombing of Sarajevo began, with the aim of implementing UNESCO's instructions for marking endangered historical monuments in war zones. UNESCO's characteristic, coded signs, its blue triangular symbols on white flags hastily made from bed sheets and hung on museums, old churches and mosques only helped the aggressors to aim more accurately at their pre-selected targets.

Post-War Burying of the Past and the Exhuming of Mass Graves

Life in post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina is marked by the burying of its wartime past and the exhumation of

mass graves. In the name of national reconciliation and the country's reconstruction, there is little public discussion about these grave-digging activities. Culture and art (with the help of political pressure from international institutions and humanitarian aid) are contributing to the current disinfection of reality, just as during the war they unintentionally contributed to its aesthetisation as desired by the international public.

Unlike the pre-war division of the art scene into conservative and progressive, today's scene could be reduced to local and international, with the latter being subdivided into those that operate with the assistance of the Sarajevo Centre for Contemporary Art (a successor of the Soros Network of Centres for Contemporary Arts) and the one that functions through the *Ars Aevi* project (the future Museum of Contemporary World Art).

George Soros has fully or partially withdrawn from many of the centres he had set up throughout Eastern Europe. Thanks to Dunja Blažević, the centre in Sarajevo is one of the few in the Balkans that has remained in operation. In my view, its most significant contribution is its commitment to fostering contemporary art production and international collaboration. *Meeting Point* in 1997 was one of the major and most vibrant actions organised by the centre (whose events are becoming more and more modest due to dwindling financial resources). Following a call for entries, the selected artists were given the possibility to realise a series of works and actions in the old part of Sarajevo. The event, which lasted for almost a year, was documented in a catalogue published upon its conclusion. To me, it seemed to be a final realisation of the pre-war tendency of young Sarajevans to free art from the uncomfortable grip of authorities. 'Out of what had been chosen and selected, we made one, in all aspects pure, sincere and serene event that carried in itself the sensibility that had been hidden and almost lost beneath the layered deposits of the war years.'⁸

Among other things, this exhibition promoted a large number of young artists. Over time, it has also become clear that one of the centre's merits is the feminisation of the otherwise patriarchal field of visual arts, so it is no coincidence that the post-war scene is dominated by Alma Sarajlić, Šejla Kamerić, Danica Dakić, Maja Bajević, Amila Zbanić and others. These female artists deal with the problems of identity, emigration, war traumas, and the like — with all that has special weight in the reality of Bosnia-Herzegovina today and which provides special inspiration.

Despite the devastation and post-war poverty, Sarajevo is now witnessing the consolidation of its cultural scene and powers, which were joined together particularly successfully in the events that marked the tenth anniversary of its siege on 6 April 2002. Šejla Kamerić and Haris Pašović organised a fashion show in which models wore parts of the clothes that people preserved from the war. Although Pašović is an experienced theatre director and Šejla Kamerić the embodiment of a young, successful, intelligent artist, they could not have provoked the release of emotions — a true collective catharsis — that took place on that occasion without the unique will of Sarajevans to overcome, but not forget, the war. The models were not announced by the names of designers, but by the names of the people who owned and wore the clothes when they were killed or injured. Among the clothes shown on the catwalk there was a jacket (with a shrapnel hole) that belonged to a man who sat in a wheelchair in the audience that night and the hat of a well-known journalist who died during the war. Talking with people who saw this fashion show, which, to my great regret I did not attend, I realised that it could have ended as a humorous, sentimental performance, had not the memories of the siege run out of control — only a few people were able to hold back the tears, it was as if everyone was glad to be able to cry again.

Braco Dimitrijević

(b. 1948 Sarajevo)

A major figure in the New Art Practice,⁹ Braco Dimitrijević is routinely included in exhibitions highlighting art from Bosnia, despite the fact that he does not live in Bosnia-Herzegovina and did not receive his professional training there.

Dimitrijević studied in Zagreb (at the Academy of Fine Arts 1968–71) and in London (at St. Martin's School of Art 1971–3) and lives in Paris. He began his artistic career whilst a student in Zagreb; there he shared conceptualist views with Goran Trbuljak (who was part of Tihomir Simčić's group). Dimitrijević gained international renown in 1971 when we took part in the Paris Biennale, an international exhibition for young artists. His works have been displayed in many of the most important international art exhibitions¹⁰ and in major art institutions (including the Centre Georges Pompidou, the Tate Gallery and the Guggenheim Museum). His art is also often presented in his native Sarajevo, usually in large historical surveys of Bosnian art.

The basic concept in Dimitrijević's work has been more or less consistent, from his first remarkable portraits of casual passers-by that were displayed in public spaces in Zagreb, Paris and New York, to gallery installations presented under the collective title *Triptychos Post Historicus*,¹¹ which were always made out of man-made objects (artwork or handicraft work) combined with objects from nature, with both types of material receiving equal treatment. Dimitrijević's primary concern has been to re-examine the social norms that shape the relationships between artist and spectator and between what is and is not art.

But in more recent works, created for the most part after the outbreak of war in Bosnia, Dimitrijević seems to be changing his stance, tentatively speaking, from being a critic of social distinctions and norms to an advocate of such norms. This can be seen in the installation *Citizens of Sarajevo* 1993, presented at the 45th Venice Biennale. Axes were jammed into the wall between portraits of the world's great artists, sending the clear message that these artists are in jeopardy. A similar interpretation could be given for a more recent installation in the Paris zoo, where important works of art were placed into cages with the animals, apparently they were not affected by being in the presence of great art. Dana Mouton Cibulski described the placing of works of art in the animal kingdom as, among other things, a 'possible lesson on the tolerance of acceptance and peaceful coexistence for us all.'¹²

Regardless of the undoubted importance of Dimitrijević and his highly respected international position, my trust in the ethical side of his work is fading in relation to his silence during the siege of his city.

At the express request of Braco Dimitrijević, the photograph of his work from the *Casual Passers-By* series is not published in this book.

Jusuf Hadžifejzović

(b. 1957 Sarajevo)

fig. 147

Before Jusuf Hadžifejzović became an artist who identified with (even as he distanced himself from) the destiny and geography of the Balkans, he strove to take advantage of everything the international art scene had to offer, at least to the extent he could do so as a student at the Academy of Fine Arts in Belgrade (1976–80) and then later at the Staatliche Kunstakademie in Düsseldorf (1980–2). Born in

Prijepolje, Hadžifejzović first lived in Sarajevo while a student at the Secondary School for the Arts (1971–6); he returned to the city in 1984 and lived there until the beginning of the Bosnian War in 1992, when he left for Antwerp. Since the end of the war, he has divided his time between Antwerp and Sarajevo. Hadžifejzović's changing experiences, role models, and attitudes make him something of a 'walking history' of contemporary art. Unlike Braco Dimitrijević, who developed his ideas consistently over decades, Hadžifejzović was systematic, and for a long time he worked, and was treated, as a 'contaminated' conceptualist, baffling even the more progressive Yugoslav critics, who were for the most part modernist purists.

Nevertheless, it is possible to identify two consistent parallel genres in Hadžifejzović's work, namely, installation and performance. In most cases, the two forms supplement each other, since Hadžifejzović usually opens his *in situ* exhibitions with a performance.

While initially the installations aimed at adapting to whatever options were available and detecting the identity of a specific place, they eventually evolved into works that address, both critically and emotionally, ever greater expanses in the spirit of postmodern skepticism. As a rule, the installations have the same generic title, *Depot* (which initially referred to the storehouse of a museum), plus the name of the place where the installation was made: Zenica, Sarajevo, etc.

In 1981, in the depot of the Art Gallery of Bosnia-Herzegovina in Sarajevo, Hadžifejzović discovered a sixty-metre-long roll of scaffolding cloth on which he painted two wide parallel lines (one black and one white). He hoped to display this cloth on the façade of the Workers' University, where he was invited to take part in the exhibition *How to Save a Painting* (the show was conceived as an ironic contribution to the then-current debate over how paintings were endangered). But because he did not receive permission to use the exterior of the building, he displayed the cloth on transportable gallery crates along the walls of a large exhibition hall. This was Hadžifejzović's first installation in Sarajevo. The installation at the Gallery of Zenica 1984, included not only works of art from the gallery's storage space, but also a complete set of actual socialist paraphernalia for workers' elections and a supply of heating coal. He would often set up cafés in the exhibition halls of Sarajevo galleries. These temporary cafés (at the Art Gallery of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Energoinvest Gallery, both in

1989 in Sarajevo) represented a logical extension of the prevailing urban environment, as well as a critique of the austerity of official spaces. In 1989, in the depot of the Pančevo City Gallery (Pančevo, then in Yugoslavia now in Serbia & Montenegro), Hadžifejzović found an astonishing collection of military supplies — stretchers for transporting the wounded and first-aid kits with bandages and medicines. A logical continuation of the emerging war story which began at the Pančevo Gallery may be seen in his 1991 installation *Kraków Depot/Triumphal Alley-Trophys Hospital*, at the Krysztofory Gallery in Kraków, Poland. This was the last important exhibition Hadžifejzović participated in before the outbreak of the Bosnian War.

From that time on, Hadžifejzović's career developed in the international arena — in Antwerp, Oslo, Copenhagen, Helsinki, Istanbul, Tel Aviv, Johannesburg, Los Angeles, and other places — with works informed by the émigré experience.

Of his many performances, two that spring to mind because of the intense emotion they elicited from the audience, are *From Kitsch to Blood There is But a Step* (at the Cetinje Biennial 1991) and *The Future is Now* (presented in Le Mans, France, in 1993). For both performances, Hadžifejzović drank intensively beforehand in order to enhance their spontaneity. The two works took spectators through a reality that was soon to happen: warfare (in the Cetinje performance) and resettlement (in the Le Mans performance).

In *The Future is Now*, Hadžifejzović wore a sizable chunk of stone on his head, which his assistant then bored through with a power drill while the performer talked on a telephone. During this telephone conversation, the audience learned that he was talking with his son, that they were refugees in Belgium, and that his son had just learned the Flemish word for window.

Zvono

(est. 1982)

fig. 133

The artist group Zvono (Bell) took its name from a café in Sarajevo, where it was formed in 1982; the group was active until the outbreak of war in 1992. Its members were Biljana Gavranović, Sadko Hadžihasanović, Sejo Čizmić, Narcis Kantardžić and Aleksandar Šaša Bukvić, with Kemal Hadžić joining later. Most of these artists had graduated from the newly established Academy of Fine Arts in Sarajevo.¹³

The group was active not only in Sarajevo but throughout the former Yugoslavia, exhibiting, among other places, in Belgrade, at Student City 1982, the Store Window of the Beograd Department Store on Knez Mihajl Street 1985, and the Yugoslav Fine Arts Triennial 1987; Zagreb, at Cvjetni Square 1983; and Ljubljana, in the exhibition *A Moment in the Art of Bosnia-Herzegovina* 1988.

Aleksandar Šaša Bukvić is considered to be the initiator of the group's collaborative work and the driving force behind its organisation and promotion; even today, he remains the main source for information about Zvono. Bukvić also received the greatest media attention because of his dual identity as both a sculptor and a professional pastry chef.

There was no unified programme defining Zvono's identity; rather, the artists came together primarily for the sake of artistic survival. They exhibited work and created performances in important public spaces in Sarajevo — on streets and squares, in store windows and in cafés — and made a significant contribution to the popularisation of art in Sarajevo and other parts of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Zvono's decision to make art on the streets and at other informal sites, as well as the group's use of new media, did not, however, arise from the same concerns that were behind the New Art Practice, which emerged in Belgrade and Zagreb in the 1970s and which sought to challenge the established art system and the role of the artist in society. Among other things, the Zvono artists were looking for ways to attract attention to themselves as a means of finding a way into the institutions of the art system. In the early 1980s, the formal art scene in Sarajevo was crowded with wave upon wave of young artists pouring out of the newly established art academy. Since neither the art academy nor the University of Sarajevo had any suitable student centre, the Zvono café, one of many cafés frequented by artists, became for a time a kind of unofficial student art centre.

The unselfconscious reliance on the resources at hand, faith in enthusiasm and prevailing populist tastes, a willingness to create something from virtually no materials, and the desire to persuade art audiences traditionally inclined towards sentimental Oriental styles to appreciate new art forms — these were all characteristics of what was to become Sarajevo's New Primitivism. The Zvono artists never explicitly declared themselves part of this cultural movement, but that was largely because the term was primarily used in reference to music bands.

One of Zvono's most memorable pieces was the performance *Sport and Art* 1986, which was staged during a regular football match at the Koševo Stadium. Here they took the idea of the democratisation of art — as both ideology and personal aspiration — to absurd limits. During a break in the game, Zvono artists, dressed in the colours of the visiting team, ran out onto the pitch, put canvases on easels and did some painting, then circled the field with the pictures held high above their heads as if they were carrying trophies. The shouts and cries from the stunned football fans could not be clearly deciphered as either approval or indignation, but the combined sense of daring and fear felt that day by the members of the group is surely something they still recall.

Amir Vuk

(b. 1957 Sarajevo)

fig. 184

The architect Amir Vuk has designed some of Sarajevo's most remarkable cafés. The people of Sarajevo are particularly fond of cafés, which add to the liveliness of the city and make it more attractive for visitors. Vuk does not specialise in cafés — architects in post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina have no such luxury — but, like other architects, he also designs banks and villas, in addition to restoring buildings damaged during the war. But Vuk is especially partial to cafés because, as he explains by paraphrasing Mies van der Rohe, 'Churches and cafés are not architecture, but atmosphere.'

Vuk graduated from the School of Architecture at the University of Sarajevo in 1980. Since then, he has been active on the Bosnian architecture scene, with the exception of the years spent in exile in Slovenia. Vuk's creative interpretation of Bosnia-Herzegovina's rich architectural heritage, with its range of influences from Ottoman to West European, can be clearly seen even in his earliest works. The villa Dino, for example, built in 1986–7 and one of Vuk's first major projects, was designed in two separate sections, the first inspired by Ottoman architecture, the second by European architecture. Vuk is not the only Bosnian architect to draw on the past; his teachers, the well-known Sarajevo architects Zlatko Ugljen and Nedžad Kurto, also achieved significant success in this regard. The difference between Vuk and the others, however, is that whereas previous architects redesigned the architecture of the past in a spirit of modernism, Vuk has been working in the spirit of postmodern architecture with an added dose of Sarajevo New Primitivism. This

cultural movement inspired a trend in architecture that focused on the long-concealed interiors of the once grand but now dilapidated houses from Bosnia's Turkish heritage — a result of the general impoverishment that the people and region have experienced over the past century.

From the cafés he designed before the outbreak of war (Miris Dunja (The Scent of Quince) and RS (Restaurant Sarajevo)), to the first New Primitives cafés built in collaboration with Mirko Marić, which brought him acclaim, to the post-war cafés Atrij (Atrium), Boemi (The Bohemians), Bugatti and others — Vuk's designs have done much more than guarantee café owners booming business. The pre-war cafés served as unofficial cultural centres to make up for the lack of independent youth clubs and student centres. The cafés built after the war have also helped to bring Sarajevo back to life, highlighting the diversity of its history and population. In designing his cafés, Vuk brings features borrowed from the most beautiful parts of Old Sarajevo and traditional Bosnian houses into the modern Europeanised sections of the city. And when he really gets going, he may also incorporate elements of Italian, French, or some other national-historical style.

Like most native Sarajevans, Vuk can be unashamedly sentimental about the city, celebrating it with all its faults and merits — its remarkable (but decaying) architectural heritage, its modest economic potential and its great aspirations. Vuk has made an important contribution to the revival of Sarajevo, helping its citizens to feel good about themselves and their city as they get together in one of his delightful cafés.

Trio

(est. 1985)

fig. 156

Every discussion about the design group Trio usually begins by stating that there are, in fact, only two members, Dalila Duraković (b. 1966 Sarajevo) and Bojan Hadžihalilović (b. 1964 Sarajevo) — the third member of the original Trio, Leila Mulabegović (b. 1966 Sarajevo) immigrated to Switzerland. All three studied graphic design at the Academy of Fine Arts in Sarajevo. Unlike the Zvono group, Trio operates in a unified way that makes it impossible to differentiate the separate contributions of the individual members.

Although the group has been active since 1985 (designing posters, album covers, book jackets, etc.), Trio only gained international recognition during the

Bosnian War, when it created a series of postcards and posters with the slogan 'Greetings from Sarajevo'. Its posters, which featured redesigned popular iconography from the consumer society, met with an enthusiastic response from international critics, and Hadžihalilović and Duraković were given the kind of media exposure no artist in the region had ever previously received. Their work, perceived as a caustic critique of wartime consumerism, was published in the world's best-known news, political and art magazines — *Life*, *Newsweek*, *The Face*, *Creative Review*, *Art Press*, *Graphis*, *Print*, and *Flash Art*, among others.

The Italians were particularly generous in their compliments. Bonito Oliva, speaking at the opening of a Trio exhibition in Milan in 1995, said of the group's activity: 'All this is a demonstration of the fact that art does not yield to negative events but changes into remembrance, like Picasso and his *Guernica*.' On the same occasion, Oliviero Toscani said: 'Life goes on even as people die ... Does it bother you that trade continues during agony? Perhaps the world should stop? But in this whirl of conflicts art luckily lives. Bojan and Dada Hadžihalilović are proof of this, as they continue their work as graphic designers and artists in war-torn Sarajevo.'¹⁴

It is worth noting that the reception of the group's posters varied in different regions. In the former Yugoslavia and, more generally, in Europe, the poster *Enjoy Sarajevo*, derived from the Coca-Cola logo, was considered to be, perhaps, their most successful work in its use of symbolism to criticise wartime consumerism; it received enormous attention from viewers at the exhibition of war posters at the Art Gallery of Bosnia-Herzegovina in Sarajevo and at City Hall in Paris in 1993. The American public, however, seemed to prefer the poster featuring Kemal Hadžić's photograph of the cellist Vedran Smajlović playing among the charred ruins of Sarajevo's National Library; this poster was included in the exhibition *At All Fronts*, a display of twentieth century European war posters, at the Hood Museum of Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire in 1999, and at the library of Boston University in 2002.

Alma Suljević

(b. 1963 Kakanj)

fig. 227

The art of Alma Suljević has been almost entirely defined by the Bosnian War and its aftermath. Given

the activist nature of her installations, videos, and performances, her work may be described as art in the public interest, to borrow a phrase from Glenn Harper. Through both her art and her activism, Suljević is striving to put an end to the killing by landmines — even today, people are killed every day by one of the approximately three million landmines left over from the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In her commitment to the cause, Suljević has helped to clear minefields.

Trained as a sculptor, in her earliest work on this theme, Suljević treated mines as sculptures in the traditional sense, exhibiting them on pedestals in galleries. In this first stage of her work, the deactivation of the mines' killing mechanism was purely symbolic: she gave the mines female names and packed them in hatboxes. Suljević later continued this symbolic deactivation by placing United Nations minefield maps on the floor of the exhibition area, on which she would write down her traumatic memories from the war.

Such concerns eventually led Suljević to a project that placed her in genuine mortal danger: *Annulling the Truth* (Sarajevo 1999) involved the deactivation of actual landmines. The mine-deactivation campaign evolved further into a project entitled *The Fourth Entity*, which is the artist's collective name for the minefields in Bosnia-Herzegovina. As part of the project, Suljević sold soil that had covered the mines at Sarajevo's symbolic marketplace Markale — her aim was not only to raise money for destroying mines, but also to raise public awareness about the issue.

Suljević is currently planning to elevate this project to an international level by selling cans of minefield soil on the world market. As a marketing strategy, she intends to play the role of Princess Diana in a performance that will not only be an homage to the late Princess of Wales, but also a grotesquely placed criticism of the international community's glamorous approach to a problem that is deadly serious.

Danica Dakić

(b. 1962 Sarajevo)

fig. 215

Danica Dakić's work deals with the intertwining of geographical, political, cultural and personal identities from the perspective of someone with a transcultural background. Her projects are centred on video and audio installations; one of her works, the installation *No Title*, which was part of the exhibition *Sculpture*

and *Installation in the Past Twenty Years* at the Art Gallery of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 2000, was, according to Ivana Jevdjević, Bosnia's first audio installation.

Dakić, who graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Sarajevo and completed her postgraduate studies in Belgrade, now divides her time between Sarajevo and Düsseldorf; in fact, she has been living in both Bosnia and Germany since before the War. One of her mentors in Düsseldorf was Nam June Paik. In Germany, Dakić acquired the theoretical knowledge and practical experience required to understand the specific political and cultural aspects of emigration.

The video installation *Self-Portrait 1999* provides a characteristic example of Dakić's investigation into the divided nature of the émigré identity. Dakić described the work to me in the following terms: 'At first glance the face in the video installation is reminiscent of an Old Master portrait. Yet the artist has made a small but disturbing change: a second mouth replaces the eyes and transforms the beautiful face into a futuristic "Mona Lisa 2000" with hints of surrealist painting. The figure is animated: the two mouths tell two different fairy tales, one in German, the other in Bosnian. The stories are about changing roles, about truth and the deception of sensory impressions. As the title *Self-Portrait* suggests, this is a self-portrait by the artist. We cannot recognise her by the eyes, as is customary, but only by the narratives uttered by the two mouths.'

Another significant, and more recent, project dealing with emigration (an inflammatory subject not only in Bosnia but also worldwide) was developed in collaboration with the Croatian artist Sandra Sterle. The goal of *Go Home*,¹⁵ performed in New York in 2001, was to bring participants together for an open dialogue on the topics of exile, national identity, technology and globalisation. The project was structured both as an open house that took place in the artists' temporary New York home and as a site on the web. Both the physical and the virtual homes provided a common meeting ground for people to create and present videos, photographs, and other installations, and to discuss issues with specially invited participants.¹⁶

Šejla Kamberić

(b. 1976 Sarajevo)

fig. 231

Šejla Kamberić, who was born in Sarajevo and studied graphic design there, is the youngest artist on this list.

She represents the generation of Sarajevans who spent their teenage years in a city under siege, a fact that could not help but shape their sense of reality. This generation grew up in a claustrophobically confined physical space that existed concurrently with an infinitely open media space — this experience was common to all who lived in Sarajevo during the war years (1992–5). This ambivalent sense of space created an equally ambivalent sense of reality, which was defined by something known globally as the 'new world order' but which was felt in Sarajevo as a 'new world border'.

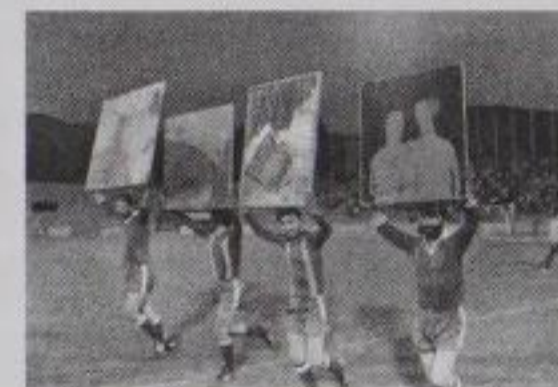
Kamberić's art to date can be characterised as work intended to (de)stabilise and (dis)organise the environment. Formally heterogeneous — she has made interventions, performances, videos, etc. — all of her projects have a basic procedure in common that involves dislocating fragments of a stable reality by means of a kind of copy and paste method. Indeed, one of her works was even titled *Copy-Paste* (presented at *Meeting Point*, as part of the first annual SCCA — Sarajevo exhibition 1997); it was a photographic intervention in which Kamberić drew a part of the Culhan — the destroyed top of a wall with a tree growing from it — to the same level as the viewer. The relation between the original and the copy underlines the connection between the past (the old-town urban elements) and the present (computer commands 'copy' and 'paste').¹⁷ In later works, this procedure evolved conceptually into dislocating copied signs, inscriptions, street signs and symbols, so that their originally intended meaning and function were either made ironic and/or neutralised.

Most of Kamberić recent works have been created in this spirit, for example, *Crossroads 1999*, made during a residency in Pereyaslavl-Zalesskiy, Russia, or *EU/ Others 2000*, constructed for *Manifesta 3* in Ljubljana, Slovenia. This latter work received much comment in both the local and international press.

- 1 As cited in the frontispiece of *The 'Graves'*, Gilles Press/E. Stover, Scalo, Zurich 1998
- 2 A. Hozić, 'Making of the Unwanted Colonies: (Un)Imagining Desire', in J. Dean (ed.), *Cultural Studies & Political Theory*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca 2000, p. 230
- 3 This was a characteristic cultural movement in Sarajevo in the 1980s that embraced music, literature, theatre, architecture and the visual arts and meant a liberation from strictly defined cultural norms and institutional pressures as well as a resistance to the monopoly of the centres (Belgrade, Zagreb, etc.) and unified ideology. It also expressed a renewed (and at that time and context unusual) interest in tradition and in the past. See N. Zildžo, 'I do remember', in *Sarajevo's New Primitives* (exh. cat.),

- Art Gallery of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Sarajevo 1990, p. 4
- 4 T. Alvdj, 'Od prozora do ekrana', in *Sarajevo's New Primitives* (exh. cat.), Art Gallery of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Sarajevo 1990, p. 5
 - 5 T. Mitchell (ed.), *Global Noise*, Wesleyan University Press, Connecticut 2001, p. 9
 - 6 S. Sontag, 'Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo', in *Performing Arts Journal*, n° 47, 1994
 - 7 By chance, I managed to visit the Biennale about ten days after its opening. This was my first journey out of Sarajevo during the war, by a UN military aircraft, thanks to an accreditation by an interpreter of *Première Urgence*, a French humanitarian organisation. I had not expected foreign artists and critics to shed crocodile tears for us, but I was shocked to see how everything in Venice was normal, as if nothing was going on half an hour's flight from there. At the Biennale's reception desk I asked for a free copy of the catalogue, which I was entitled to as a member of an international association, plus I had proper accreditation from Nermina Kurspahić, editor of culture magazine *Odjek*. The receptionist patiently explained to me that I could not get the catalogue because I had not booked my copy at least ten days prior to the opening of the Biennale. I showed her my passport, from which it was evident that I came from Sarajevo — actually I only had one red stamp in it, 'Sarajevo — Maybe Airline,' which was a joke made up by bored UN soldiers. I told her that the post office in Sarajevo did not work because it had been burnt down, that we were in isolation and that it was a miracle that I had come to Venice at all. But she stubbornly refused, repeating 'sorry'. At that moment I wished that Venice would finally sink into the Adriatic together with the Giardini and all of us. In the end I sought out Bonito Oliva, the director of the Biennale, who intervened in my favour.
 - 8 M. Husedžinović, *Meeting Point* (exh. cat.), Soros Centre for Contemporary Art, Sarajevo 1997
 - 9 "New art(istic) practice", a term drawn from Althusser's conception of "theoretical practice", was an umbrella term used by the younger generation of Yugoslavian art critics to identify post-object art, conceptual art, Arte Povera, process art, performance and body art, video, artists' films, photo-works, sound environments and New Music. This "other art" appeared in different parts of Yugoslavia immediately prior to and after 1968.' B. Pejić, 'Post-Communism and the Rewriting of (Art) History'. ican.artnet.org/ican/text?id_text=33
 - 10 He has participated in Venice Biennales in 1976, 1982, 1990 and in 1993; at *Documenta* 5, 6 and 9, and the Sydney Biennials in 1978 and 1986 among others.
 - 11 He started the series *Triptychos Post Historicus* in the mid-1970s and in 1976 coined the term 'Post History,' which he defines as a possibility of coexistence of different ideas and styles.
 - 12 D. M. Cibulski, *Braco Dimitrijević: Ménagerie du Jardin des Plantes*, Paris. www.pariswoman.com/paris/reports/bdimitrijevic.htm
 - 13 Bukvić, born in Šabac in 1949, graduated in sculpture in 1982; Čizmić, born in Nevesinje in 1958, graduated in painting in 1982; Kantardžić, born in Derventa in 1958,

- graduated in painting in 1982; Gavranović, born in Gornji Orlovci in 1957, graduated in painting in 1982; Hadžihasanović, born in Bihać in 1959, graduated in painting and later completed a postgraduate degree in Belgrade in 1984; Hadžić, born in Ključ in 1947, graduated from the Teacher's College in Sarajevo in 1968.
- 14 From a letter by Bojan Hadžihalilović sent to the author
 - 15 www.project-go-home.com/gohome/NYdiaries/nydiary_danica.html
 - 16 www.project-go-home.com
 - 17 www.scca.ba/exhibitions/meetingpoint/meetingpoint/22sejla/sejla.htm



From left to right and top to bottom:

- Jusuf Hadžifejzović *Arbeit Macht Frei* 1989
 Zvonko Bell *Sport and Art* 1986
 Amir Vuk *Avlija 21* 1997
 Trio *Enjoy Sarajevo* 1993
 Alma Suljević *Research for my Friends* 2000
 Danica Dakić *Self-Portrait* 1999
 Šejla Kamerić *EU/Others* 2000

Tracing Back

Iara Boubnova

Tracing back, or mapping the key figures and events in the development of contemporary art in Bulgaria after World War II seems like an impossible task. One may claim that the 'utopia' of real socialism as the countries of Eastern Europe knew it before 1989, was the ultimate conclusive materialisation of the modernist project as an artwork that encompassed the whole of society. Thus, such a convenient argument would maintain that anything and everything, including the visual arts, existing within the utopian construction is somehow a fragment of the history of twentieth century art. Unfortunately, a less speculative approach would reveal how impossible it is to defend this position when professional arguments and concrete examples are asked for. The professional impossibility of constructing a logical succession of artists and events before 1984–5 is grounded in the simple fact that hardly anything from the abundant artistic production in the country between 1945 and 1984–5 would merit the qualification of a direct link to what, even if only for the purposes of this volume, is taken to be the state of contemporary art and artists in Bulgaria now. It is an incredibly difficult task to speak of alternative or underground artistic activities in Bulgaria prior to 1984–5. Even at that time the first signs of alternative artistic thinking were not at the same time signs of alternative social ideas, let alone dissident trends. If there were events, artists, publications, etc. that might be considered to have furthered a process of contemporary artistic development, these would not be direct influences in terms of form, content, paradigm or experimentation. Rather they would fall into the category of contextual 'encouragements' of talented younger artists to go 'their own way' in search of their own personal style loosely falling under the definition of 'socialist art'. For instance, when in around the period between 1986

and 1988, some of the first rather self-conscious, self-organised and significant contemporary art group events started taking place in Sofia and other cities in the country, the artists of the older generation (such as Yoan Leviev, Christo Stefanov, Christo Neykov, etc. who formed their artistic practice in the early 1960s), were comparing these informal semi-happening/semi-exhibition events to the 'free-style, anything goes, let it all out' student parties they had organised in their youth. In their eyes, the deadly serious attempts, at least from the point of view of the exhibition organisers and supporters of the *E/A* and *The City* (Sofia 1987 and 1988) to redefine the language of exhibition, as well as the language of visual art in the country, appeared to be just another expression of the natural inclination of any young people towards having fun, mixed with some professional engagements. At the time, the young reformers from the second half of the 1980s, already well informed and ambitious, regarded that attitude as artistic ignorance and took serious offence.

The Art Academy in Sofia was established relatively late, in 1888, as a classical Academy for Fine Arts following the German, Central European and Russian models of extensive, traditional artistic education, dominated by well established local and imported Czech academic professors who, as well as cultural workers in other fields, were invited to Bulgaria to help the brotherly Slavic country rebuild itself. By the 1950s the Sofia Art Academy had turned into one of the strongholds of conservatism and socialist realism in the arts. The few professors, who were conscious of modernism and were European minded in their awareness of art practices outside their country, were either pushed out or allocated to minor Chair positions such as in the discipline of 'technology of painting'. The most advanced teaching in the

Academy was offered by eccentric local artists/philosophers, such as Iliya Beshkov, who with his charismatic personality managed to develop a highly individual artistic style, which was grudgingly tolerated but not exactly accepted by the official artistic dogma of the time. Though the art practice in Bulgaria before World War II had been provincial and a bit slow to react, it certainly wasn't lacking in modernist tendencies. By the 1950s though, these tendencies had been pushed to the margins to become an eccentric presence in the art scene. The situation is exemplified by the fact that people such as the art critic Kiril Kristev, whose awareness of developments in European art in the twentieth century, as well as his own links to local modernist practices, is in many ways unrecognised locally even to this day; or Prof. Nikolai Raynov, whose links to Symbolism and other earlier trends had to be whitewashed so that he could be assimilated into the Academy's History of Art curriculum as a teacher. Other existing links with earlier pre-World War II artistic practices and European developments were also marginalised or at best utilised for practical purposes. Thus, Boris Angeloushev, who in the 1920–30s had been a key member of the leftist, post-Dada Berlin circles and press, working under the pseudonym Bruno Fucks became involved in graphic design and book illustration; Kiril Tzonev, at one point a member of the Munich art scene and a proponent of *Neue Sachlichkeit* worked in the field of 'technology of painting' and Dechko Uzounov, with his pre-World War II Paris School-type artistic practice, charismatic bohemian aura and personality was an example of a conversion to the correct social-realism style.

All these artists, although no longer linked to current developments in international contemporary art, Central European art capitals, nor to any sort of advanced experimentation, were nonetheless a living reminder and hallmark of the once existing climate of openness belonging to a larger artistic context. However, the fact remains that the mid-1960s student parties and happenings in Sofia were an isolated occasion of openness and fun mixed with soft experimentation without any significant lasting impact on subsequent art production. At that time the Academy had entered into its current stage of lethargy and there have been only rare occasions since when attempts have been made at refreshing the curriculum. Although in Bulgaria there are several non-official alternative venues for art education, the country is still

bogged down with the premise that a good artist is one who can draw, paint or sculpt well rather than one who also has an ability to think visually in a more contemporary and conceptually relevant manner. Therefore, the National Art Academy in Sofia is a good place to go to if you want to develop classical drawing skills and not a good place to go to if you want to develop any sort of contemporary conceptual thinking. Yet in spite of this, young contemporary minded artists continue to graduate from this institution. They learn something from the few advanced teachers in the academy but mostly through immersing themselves into the contemporary art scene in Sofia early in their artistic education. The irony is that many of these artists — who have often achieved impressive *curricula vitae* while still students, graduating with documentation of realised installation or site-specific projects, video works and so on — for their graduation shows, alongside documentation of quite advanced, contemporary works, would have to show a classical academic painting, such as a life study of the human nude, in order to placate their professors, who would otherwise refuse to evaluate the student because they had taught them for instance, how to paint and not how to make a video. The National Art Academy (as the school is now called) has preserved not only its conservative curriculum but also its inner structure of strictly defined faculties for fine and applied arts, as well as the corresponding departments of painting, sculpture and graphics and on the other side, for ceramics, stage design, textile and wood carving amongst others. One of the few redeeming features of the curriculum is the fact that art history is taught and that the curriculum is a four-year, linear chronological course of education starting with pre-historic art and extending to twentieth century art. This accounts for the early mutual awareness of artists and art critics, historians and curators about their concerns and practices.

As in all other Soviet Bloc countries, the other defining factor of artistic life in pre-1989 Bulgaria was the Union of Bulgarian Artists. A state-sanctioned, official association of artists, this institution played a similar role to the Academy, although the comparison between the two within the socialist model of management of artistic life and promotion of artistic values would reveal that the union was infinitely more advanced in terms of flexibility and 'creative freedom'. The union, the result of the gradual post-World War II absorption and merger of all artists' groups and

societies that had existed before the war, was established by the early 1960s as the main arbiter of artistic taste and value while at the same time being the sole organiser of artistic life. As in other socialist countries, the union of artists became the strange context of merger between ideology, party and state power and artistic self-management by individual artists not only trusted by the regime but also entrusted with an authority, power and freedom to make decisions that seem incredible in retrospect. That artists themselves were allocated and delegated the power to make decisions at a state level concerning artistic matters and life was an astounding development, beginning in earnest in the early 1970s and remaining unchanged until the late 1980s. Sustained despite growing unrest in intellectual circles after 1985 around the time of perestroika. Although the union was run by artists, it was structured in a strict hierarchical manner with clearly delineated levels of authority, internal organisation, decision making procedures and standards of quality (i.e. a clear system of awareness as to who the 'best' artists were). It was a unique situation that an incredibly high level of trust was transferred from the state ideological apparatus, the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party (the sole ruler of the country), to the Union of Bulgarian Artists and its numerous decision making bodies such as juries composed of artists on state commissions for public art, group shows, planned use of available exhibition spaces and participation in international art events. Although always subjected to scrutiny by the party and the state (nearly one and the same thing in socialism), the Bulgarian system of organisation of artistic life at the time was much more flexible and relaxed in comparison to the situation in the USSR, for instance. Among its noteworthy features was the way all members of the Union, were sooner or later granted a studio, with secured commissions and sales of works amounting to a higher income than the average annual wages in the country (or even much higher, depending on where a particular artist was placed in the hierarchy), and above all else, the constant reaffirmation of the high social status given to art and culture that, together with sports, were supposed to be the main feature of life in the glorious future that was promised. The huge and unprecedented scale of sales and widespread institutional collecting brought about the most noteworthy negative aspect of this system, that is, that most artists nurtured the misleading

illusion that their art was important and had a real and dedicated audience. After 1989 however, this notion backfired in a number of ways. Artistic life was largely based upon interaction between several individuals operating at higher levels of state and union power, who shared an enlightened attitude towards the conditions of this unique ideological 'contract' between the party and the intellectuals. The main art figure credited with reforming the older system of artistic life, conceiving and implementing this, particularly after the mid-1970s, was Svetlin Roussev, an artist who came to prominence in the early 1960s. A charismatic teacher and painter of high quality, Roussev is still active today as an influential member of the art scene and of the country's intellectual élite. On a personal level, the system was perceived as a necessary compromise and even as a sacrifice for the benefit of the larger artistic community that could then enjoy an unprecedented level of professional protection from state ideological pressures. As a result, every moderately talented artist (according to the criteria of the times) would be incorporated sooner or later into the union of artists, and even the slightest artistic attempts at scandal and/or dissent would be interpreted in ideologically acceptable ways. Thus the system could not afford to allow room for dissidence while at the same time providing a secure and protective working environment for artists. The leaders of the Union of Bulgarian Artists held a monopoly on questions of taste and decision-making, as well as acting as the link between the party and the artist members of the union. When in 1987–8 the socialist system as a whole and in Bulgaria in particular started experiencing grave difficulties, it was the leaders of the Union of Artists and other cultural unions, e.g. of writers, filmmakers, etc. that were the first to 'burn out', were fired and were replaced by other temporary figures. As previously mentioned, the crucial period in the formation of the contemporary art scene in Sofia and Bulgaria is the second half of the 1980s. At that time, the younger generation of artists who were pushing for a change of language and artistic life, arguably had two points of reference — the first being an existing system, that they wanted to criticise and reform at any cost and the second being a desire to redefine art and the role of the artist. Questions remained as to how a new system should be structured, what forms would constitute a contemporary artistic language and what role in society should the artist have.

Naturally the second point of reference was harder to define since there were few models available to choose from, let alone the fact that there was very limited information available about contemporary developments in the international art world. So, the process of transformation and formation of a new art scene was a difficult process of trial and error, often requiring reference to a coordinated system of artistic role models. It was on these terms that the localised art scene in Bulgaria found its direction in artistic figures such as Prof. Svetlin Roussev with his strong presence on one hand, and on the other, Christo (Javacheff), whose physical absence from the scene since 1956 when he left the country (his name was banned for decades under Socialism) was becoming ever more charismatic precisely because he could and would not come back. Naturally it is neither possible nor right to restrict the work and significance of these two artists to certain limited aspects, but in terms of the formation of the contemporary art scene in Sofia, they were doomed to 'play' the role of figures of identification. The irony of the situation is that they had studied together in the same class at the Sofia Art Academy in the mid-1950s before Roussev went on to become the major figure in the Bulgarian art scene, while Christo left to become an international art celebrity and his current mythical 'presence' was defined for decades in negative terms (as a pariah, escapee and ideological diversion), through a few reproductions, some sensationalistic coverage in the press — reprints and digested 'news' from the western capitalist press, etc.

So, the paradox is that in Bulgaria many aspects of culture are dependent upon specific individuals. When in the mid-1970s Ljudmila Zhivkova, the daughter of the then Party Leader, acting in her capacity as Minister of Culture, decided to establish a museum for foreign art in Sofia, she was actually realising a gigantic curatorial project. Following her own taste and the help and advice of various party and artistic friends and experts, and using state funding, she purchased art works from all over the world in order to compile a collection that is eclectic in both content and quality. At the same time, a pompous building was erected in the city centre to house it. In 1985, four years after the death of Zhivkova, a state museum was opened in her name. This initiative was part of the governmental drive to 'open up' the country to the world. The uniqueness of this project is contingent upon the fact that for more than a

decade it oriented and defined the concept that Bulgaria had of foreign art, a concept that was based largely on the achievements of figurative painting in the twentieth century. The Union of Bulgarian Artists was also realising its policies and activities during the 1970s and the first half of the 1980s in the form of an unconscious curatorial project, without an explicit agenda but nevertheless with a certain direction towards numerous juried, thematic, national art shows and surveys. These not only categorised Bulgarian art according to different interests but also formulated a state-sanctioned, stable, internal and 'quality-oriented' hierarchy of participants, who were by necessity, members of the Union. Bearing in mind that the country did not have any alternative for contemporary artists and that foreign art was shown only in the context of state organised international 'cultural exchanges', the hierarchies designated by the union signified (and for the majority of its members still very much do so) hierarchies in international art as well. This is a good example of 'governmentality — the administration of individuals and populations' (Michel Foucault). The last months of 1989 started the process of transformation and what followed in 1990 in Bulgaria was a year of sociological surveys. The belief was that statistics was a higher form of democracy. Calculating levels of desire and expectation, as well as mass attitudes and concepts to replace ideological injustice.

In its struggle for survival, the official Union of Bulgarian Artists conducted a similar survey. However, the results disturbed even its most ardent functionaries. It turned out that the mass of Bulgarian artists were 'singing the praises' of all the recently discarded systems of state instigated restrictions i.e. juries and boards that had been appointed by the state in order to evaluate, correct, approve and endorse the work of the artists. The main motivation being that there should be a body, an institution, some responsible individuals that would determine quality in art. Practically none of the artists surveyed admitted to having experienced a restriction of freedom in their professional activities. Most artists even stressed that they felt absolutely free in their choice of subject matter, visual language, form, etc., as well as when exhibiting their works. Artists also appeared to have been satisfied with their education and with their opportunities to exhibit works abroad, at such time as they felt 'confident enough to do so'. When objections were voiced towards specific

individuals or artists that were employed by the state and considered to be exercising a 'bad influence' on the cultural policies, a positive distinction was made between Bulgaria and other countries i.e. in the recent past in the Soviet Union or Poland, artists had been subjected to repression for the nature of their works, whereas during the totalitarian period in Bulgaria anybody studying art was awarded certain freedoms and privileges. For instance, artists were allowed to grow beards and not be 'enslaved' by official employment. The former was an external symbol of the freedom of the creative individual, while the latter confirmed the illusion of an absence of restrictions on creativity. On the whole, the artists' community in Bulgaria turned out to be the most satisfied segment of society. The lack of an actual audience for art was a minor consideration. According to the Bulgarian artists, the public couldn't be considered as connoisseurs and consumers of art, their taste was seen as far too underdeveloped for independent appreciation, which was, of course, explained as errors made by the state educational programmes. There followed further comparisons with Russia, where 'people appreciate their culture by tradition' or with the West, where the free market functions as a coordinated system for evaluation. With the collapse of the state as an ideal public/connoisseur/consumer, artists became concerned that they wouldn't be understood or appreciated. Thus, following the period from 1985–9, the main difficulty facing the younger generation of artists and art critics was the free presentation of artists outside an official structure, which had previously excluded them.

At first, the break away from the framework of official institutions took the form of happenings and collective initiatives by artists, actors and musicians, almost always realised outdoors. These events sprang up fairly spontaneously and were often centred on circles of friends. The use of unconventional, alternative spaces symbolised a stepping outside of established norms, new freedoms and the otherness of the art itself. The 'multimedia' interests of the participants were viewed as an opportunity to attract a wider and more diverse audience. The total lack of an audience and communication outside of an inner circle of participants, and the attitude of society that art is actually useless were gradually being acknowledged as serious problems in the art community. Individual initiatives became the foundation for transforming the production of art

and its audience and consequently a number of exhibitions of art by the younger generation at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s were labelled as 'experimental'. This was a period of agitated debates, of disputes and discussions carried out in the printed press, in which both organisers and participants attempted to tackle questions about the shortcomings of their working environment. In weekly newspapers such as *Kultura* and *Pulse* artists and critics would debate on the lack of a modernist tradition in Bulgaria, on the potential role of the art market as a regulator of artistic production and distribution, on the 'virtues' of video art versus painting, and so on. Some of the discussions attracted the participation of an audience from outside of the usual art circuit, which provided spontaneous and highly aggressive (verbal) critique typical perhaps of the opinionated amateur. This was the context for all the concrete events from the mid-1980s to the early 1990s that are profiled in this text. The end of this period of self-questioning, rebuilding of self-confidence and reshaping of strategies was marked by the successful participation of Bulgarian artists in the 3rd International Istanbul Biennial in 1992. That also marked the moment when the Sofia contemporary art scene was recognised and its entry into the international art circuit was acknowledged. This participation comprised of the curatorial work of Luchezar Boyadjiev and myself — acting as his assistant at the time — and the works of the artists Nedko Solakov, Lyuben Kostov and Georgi Rouzhev. On a local level, this event established the professional seriousness of the term 'curator', as well as marking the start of a conscious curatorial practice. Through this successful participation, contemporary art in Bulgaria gained legitimacy as part of the international art community. Since then, the process of local development has consistently been linked to the process of an ever-increasing number of artists, both young and old, becoming part of the international art scene. Whether in the mainstream art world or in the field of new media, the concerns of art practice and artists have been defined by an interactive involvement in both local and more general issues, languages and practice. In over a decade between 1992 and 2003, the Bulgarian contemporary art scene has grown significantly, though at the moment, it is predominantly centred around Sofia. Several generations of artists have gained national and international reputations with the following names regularly appearing in

international shows: Nedko Solakov, Luchezar Boyadjiev, Kiril Prashkov and Lyuben Kostov of the older generation, Pravdoliub Ivanov, Dr. Galentin Gatev, Ventzislav Zankov, Nadezhda Liahova and Alla Georgieva of the middle generation, Rassim, Kalin Serapionov, Krassimir Terziev, Mariela Gemisheva and Tanja Abadjieva of the younger, Daniela Kostova, Boryana Dragoeva, Ivo Moudov, Missirkov/Bogdanov, Veronika Tzekova and Kamen Stoyanov of the youngest generation. Concurrently, a number of curators, such as myself, Maria Vassileva, Diana Popova, Iliyana Nedkova, Dessislava Dimova, Iliana Kolarova and Boris Kostadinov, have been very active in both the national and international contexts. In terms of infrastructure, the development of the contemporary art scene has been marked in the last few years by the activities of a number of collectives and spaces that have compensated for the severe lack of national art and cultural institutions, let alone a market. Examples are: the recent activities of the ATA Center for Contemporary Art, the Institute of Contemporary Art, the InterSpace Media Art Center, events such as *Video Archaeology* (a video festival taking place at the end of the 1990s) all in Sofia; the Art Today Foundation in Plovdiv and its annual events *Communication Front* (a new media event in the mixed format of a festival plus workshops, exhibitions and conferences), the now defunct artists' collective and artist-run gallery space XXL (between 1996 and 2002) in Sofia; and the female artists' group 8th of March. All these and other collectives function as pockets of energetic conceptualisation, fundraising, realisation and documentation of projects which in many cases are not only restricted to the participation of local artists, curators and critics. A positive feature of the current scene is its constant openness to external participation and influences as well as encouraging collaborations from a regional level in the Balkans, to far beyond.

Individual Traces

Christo and Jeanne-Claude

Iron Curtain — Wall of Oil Barrels 1962

Site-specific installation/action, rue Visconti, Paris
fig. 30

Made at the beginning of his career this well-known installation/gesture had political implications in Bulgaria as well. Since 1956, when Christo left

Bulgaria, he has not returned. Although his name was banned from public mention in the country until the end of 1989, the notoriety of the projects he did in collaboration with Jeanne-Claude such as *Surrounded Islands*, Biscayne Bay, Greater Miami, Florida 1980–3 (dedicated to his mother Tzveta, whose name means 'flower' in Bulgarian), or more recently *The Wrapped Reichstag*, Berlin 1971–95, reached the country and its artistic community. As an inventor of *empacketage* (wrapping) and the associated vast environmental projects, Christo became an internationally famous artist. As the one and only internationally acclaimed artist of Bulgarian origin for many decades, the concepts, activities, fame and success were of special interest to the Bulgarian art community. It was more in a symbolic than a concrete sense that his work and artistic aura connected the culturally isolated Bulgaria with the contemporary art world. For years, Christo has been a major figure for identification for many contemporary artists in Bulgaria. The frequent references in the media and the everyday discussion about his unwillingness to return to visit Bulgaria, even in the last fifteen years, have been read as a metaphor for the negative consequences of the changes.

Svetlin Roussev

Self-Portrait 1988

fig. 142

This confessional work by a disillusioned man is a deeply private image of a failed utopia. It marks a turning point, signalling the end of socialist art in the country. Since the early 1960s, Roussev's laconic and purist painterly style based on monumental representations of the human figure treated with expressionistic energy, was representative of the most important trend in the art of socialist Bulgaria. He never tolerated the ideological clichés of socialist realism in his art. On the contrary, his works succeed in functioning as a spiritual corrective of the ruling ideology. In an earlier work, *The Oath* 1966, for instance, viewers were confronted by a group of figures depicted crossing/blessing themselves while taking an oath of allegiance. Being the Chairman of the Union of Bulgarian Artists for twelve years in the 1970–80s, as well as a highly positioned Communist Party functionary, he had a leading role in the creation of the unique relationship — for a socialist country — between visual art and state power. He was instrumental in the invention and implementation

of the system of state commissions, annual thematic shows, art collections in the main cities and their museums, in numerous factories and other administrative offices, etc. This not only created a very strong pragmatic though ideologically motivated (at least for the sake of official approval) infrastructure of state support for artists, but also increased the importance and social value of art itself. As much as through his activities as one of the most popular national painters, the active presence of Svetlin Roussev in the public and cultural life of Bulgaria continues to be felt through the frequent interviews with him and the publications about him that often touch upon the disposition of the political élite and of society as a whole.

Kiril Prashkov and Zlati Velez

Drawings and Woodcarvings Exhibition 1986, in the (then) Gallery of the Studio of the Young Artist, Union of Bulgarian Artists, Sofia

fig. 131

In 1986, these two artists from the divergent fields of fine and applied arts, collaborated on an exhibition, considered to be very provocative at the time, which aimed to establish a meaningful professional and personal dialogue between their works. The artists took up this initiative as a gesture of revolt against the established norms that exhibition making should be based on the decisions of juries and other bureaucratic institutions. The works in the show corresponded conceptually and visually, formulating a coherent installation in the exhibition space. The show was one of the first attempts at working in the three dimensional space as well as a step towards understanding the language of installation and subsequently initiated a debate about installation as a more open, communicative and contemporary art form. The authors of this show were amongst the first to consciously search for a new artistic language as well as a new means of representing their artworks.

***E/A (Author's Proof)* 1987**

Gallery 108 Rakovski St, Sofia

fig. 132

This show is deeply significant for the beginning of the changes in the Bulgarian contemporary art scene. Based on the personal rather than official initiative of an artist, Kiril Prashkov, and a critic, Philip Zidarov,

the exhibition started with an open discussion of the concept proposed by Prashkov and Zidarov with an invited circle of artists. The project addressed many questions at the same time: the unique vs. the reproduced artwork, the logic of installation, the creation of a new public and the role of the curator. In its struggle for a new and mutual language of debate and criticism, and with its strong emphasis on direct communication with and involvement of the public, the whole event acquired a 'performative' character. Among other kinds of dialogue with the audience (such as visual dialogue through the works, for instance), artists were present in the space at all times talking to the audience, producing works on the spot and selling them for affordable prices to the visitors. The project is marked by all the naïvety and enthusiasm characteristic of the early stages in the establishment of an art scene.

One of the most significant elements of this being the creation of a collaborative work (a huge linocut printed on fabric) created by almost all of the twenty five participating artists. It was executed in the middle of the exhibition space, in front of gallery goers, over a period of two days.

Many of the participants in this show became the first generation of artists that art critics of the time labelled as 'non-conventional' due to their opposition to the traditional bureaucratic attitudes to the goals and function of art.

***The City* 1988**

Gallery of the Union of Bulgarian Artists at 108 Rakovski St, Sofia

fig. 138

Though not the first, this exhibition is one of the early significant curatorial projects of the Bulgarian art scene. It attracted special attention and became regarded as the most significant of its time because it united the critic/curator Philip Zidarov and a group of six very talented and established young artists coming from the field of traditional painting (Gredi Assa, Svilen Blazhev, Bojidar Boyadjiev, Andrei Daniel, Vihroni Popnadelev and Nedko Solakov). The participants set out to create an installation with works that were, until that time, untypical in their production both conceptually and in terms of working with space, while thinking how these works would correspond with each other in a single space. The show also functioned as an artistic platform for instigating

change in the way works are produced, exhibitions are curated and art in general is presented to the public. The unusual elements of this platform were: the very private nature of the initiative of a group of artists, as well as the long period for preparation, both conceptually and physically. It took two years of intensive collaboration for the participating artists and the curator to adapt to each others' ideas and approaches, with much debate and discussion leading to the emergence of their own innovative ideas. The show generated a lot of attention attracting the unofficial collaboration of many other artists and curators in the exhibition space, thus becoming a symbol for an entire generation to identify with. By acting as a declaration of independence from institutional structures, worn-out traditions and the need of official approval, the show was interpreted as a direct challenge to the establishment. 'The City' group, later took as its name from the title of that first show together, and has since become a cornerstone in the development of contemporary art in Bulgaria.

Lyuben Kostov

Downfall of Article I 1989. Action: domino blocks, square in front of the National Archaeological Museum, Sofia

fig. 144

In December 1989, the country was debating the dissolution of Article I of the Socialist Constitution, which stated that the Bulgarian Communist Party possessed the sole ruling authority in the country. Kostov used the metaphor of the so-called 'domino effect' implying that the downfall of this most important dogma would trigger an avalanche of unstoppable political changes. In reference to this heated public debate, he created an action, which took place on the sidewalk of one of the busiest of Sofia's city centre squares. It consisted of a simple arrangement of domino blocks placed in one continuous row in a meandering line. Pushing the first little block triggered the 'domino effect' and viewers were able to observe the resulting action. *Downfall of Article I* was the first public political art action of the Bulgarian art scene and Kostov was the first artist whose appeal and presence was based as much on his works as on his personal charisma. Around 1988–9, the artist found a way, through his artworks, to make a direct yet metaphorical connection to the reality of the country's impending and actually occurring

changes. With art works realised as political actions and ironical anti-utopian wooden machines, e.g. *Machine for Painting* 1988 which invite public participation, the artist proved that it is possible for contemporary art to comment on current reality with all its urgency and chaos in a language that is equally relevant, contemporary and yet comprehensible to a wider audience.

Nedko Solakov

The New Noah's Ark

fig. 154

The New Noah's Ark was the installation that brought international acclaim to Nedko Solakov when exhibited at the 3rd Istanbul Biennial in 1992, combining both traditional and unorthodox materials. Using the language of installation as a matter of principle, the work creates an allegorical narration that represents the instability and insecurity of the political and social transformation. Throughout the 1990s, Solakov continued to develop a good sense for large-scale installations using a great variety of media and subject matter based on a very personal and often ironic narration. This approach combined with a boundless creativity enables him to effectively react to a diverse range of situations and contexts worldwide. Through his dedication, the international, as well as the Bulgarian public and art professionals have come to fully appreciate that it is possible to have an extensive international career and a sustained level of critical, curatorial and commercial success as a contemporary artist working out of the relatively isolated Bulgarian art scene with all of its defects. One of Solakov's more recent and probably most well known works, *A Life (Black & White)* 1998–2001, is an action (repeated in a number of locations/events most notably at the Venice Biennale in 2001) in which, every day, during working hours, two wall painters paint the walls of the exhibition space, so that it alternates between black and white layers. The work is evidence of Solakov's ability to build up generalised metaphors that maintain their self-consciously ironical substance. His 'abuse' of the aura of painting, the operation with the specificity of a certain concrete space and time, makes this work relevant not only for the huge temporary shows (e.g. 49th Venice Biennale in 2001), where it has been exhibited, but also for the innovative displays of contemporary art museums (e.g. Museum Moderner Kunst, Frankfurt/Main).

Luchezar Boyadjiev

Fortification of Faith 1989–91. Installation: 142 collages and objects, dimensions 250 × 550 × 30 cm
fig. 143

The installation *Fortification of Faith*, based on the hypothesis that Jesus Christ had a twin brother, is presented through direct multiplication of the main character in collages depicting canonical scenes from the Gospel. This elaborate narrative composition of 'visual evidence' analyses the emptiness of the religious myth that gained a central importance in the post-totalitarian national identity. Boyadjiev's theoretical background and particular interest in the discursive abilities of artistic creation are revealed in projects that affirm the interwoven relationship between 'objectivity' of the social and 'subjectivity' of the personal. After his artistic intervention, the 'real' is 'developed' to its furthest imaginable limits by overlapping the personal with the social and the social with the private spheres. One of his latest projects *Artist(s) in Residency Programme* 2000, proposes collaboration, through the sharing of exhibition space, between five artists from the countries most affected by the last Balkan military conflict. In the first half of 2000, Boyadjiev invited them for a one-month residency in the Jeu de Paume museum in Paris during the exhibition *L'Autre moitié de l'Europe*, thus taking responsibility for the context and by inviting further collaborators to the project, establishing a new way of treating the guest/host/guest paradigm. Boyadjiev has an influence over, and presence in, both the local and international scenes through his art works and conceptual texts, as well as through constructing context; the production of paradigms of art making and key metaphors; the distribution of ideas, and education.

Pravdoliub Ivanov

Transformation Always Takes Time and Energy 1997. Installation: hot plates, pots, cables, water, electricity, dimensions variable
fig. 191

The viewer of this work sees only a lot of pots full of evaporating water placed on top of much smaller hot plates connected to an intricate network of electrical cables. The water never boils and nothing is ever cooked. In this powerful yet simple installation, the artist creates a metaphor for the process of unceasing

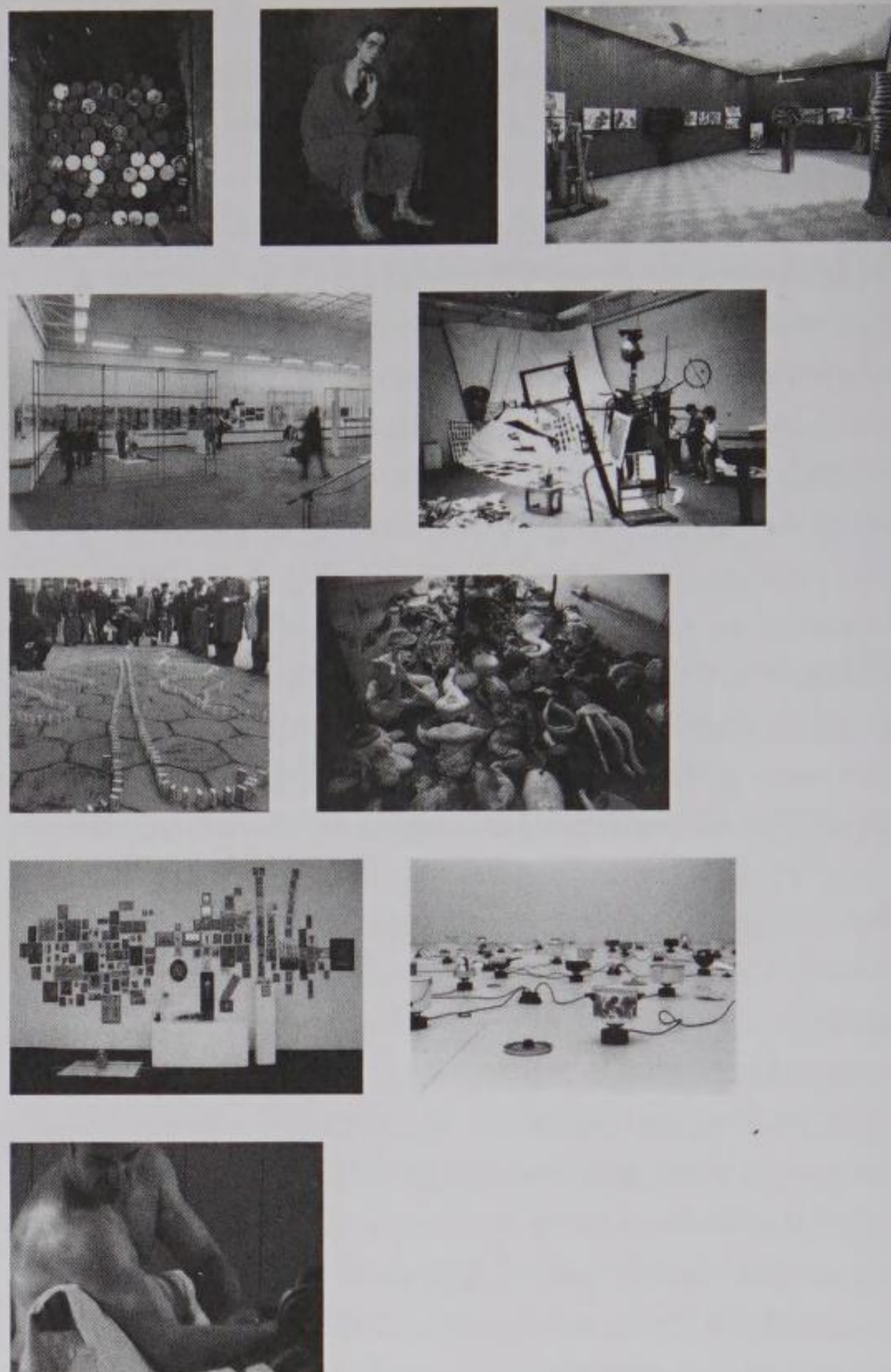
transformation, referring to the historical moment being experienced across all of Eastern Europe. Pravdoliub Ivanov's ability to bring new life to the simple object, the ready-made, the assemblage as part of an installation is unique. The object, integrated into the context of a spatial arrangement with a pertinent metaphorical statement is his trademark. The simple media with minimal or no transformation of familiar things from a context of everyday life provides the communicative power of the works, while their political relevance is suggested in a subtle manner. In *Territories*, shown in the 4th Istanbul Biennial in 1995, Ivanov defines anonymous yet physically omnipresent territories through a row of abstract flags covered in mud, thus presenting a sharp and concise visual metaphor for the then relevant topic of recognisable symbols of national identity, nationalism, etc.

Rassim

Corrections 1997–2001. Action: gym sessions, proteins, diet, vitamins, video documentation, texts
fig. 210

The project *Corrections* involved the redesigning of Rassim's body into that of a body-builder over a one and a half year period from 1997–8. The work consisted of video recordings documenting monthly stages during a process of daily training sessions at a gym, a recommended nutritional diet and course of vitamins and proteins. The project is visualised through a series of images contrasting the artist's body 'before and after' the body building course. During the project and on completion of its 'active' part, Rassim exhibited the videotapes, photos and empty protein buckets etc. The project was sponsored by FRAC Languedoc-Roussillon in Montpellier, France, and on completion was exhibited in a solo show in the Centre for Contemporary Art in Belgrade in 2001. This is probably the most widely appreciated and well-known individual project by a contemporary Bulgarian artist. Rassim's unique contribution is based on the creation of an artistic image and persona that is both the artist and the work itself. The strategy of self-presentation in public space in this persona/work, takes the form of gestures that mimic the representation of subcultures and modes of behaviour advertised in the mass media. Taking personal risks, the artist scans society in a non-aggressive and non-engaging manner while

forming a critique of the way that the new post-1989 social order involves the simulation of clichés of consumerism that have fast become a new ideological dogma.



From left to right and top to bottom:

Christo and Jeanne-Claude *Iron Curtain* 1962

Svetlin Roussev *Self-Portrait* 1988

Kiril Prashkov, Zlati Velez *Drawings and Woodcarvings Exhibition* 1986

E/A *Installation view* 1987

The City *Installation view* 1988

Lyuben Kostov *Downfall of the Article I* 1989

Nedko Solakov *New Noah's Ark* detail: *The Creatures* 1991–1992

Lučezar Boyadjiev *Fortification of Faith* 1989–1991

Pravdoliub Ivanov *Transformation always takes time and energy* 1997

Rassim *Corrections* 1998–2001

Anonymous Authors, Nameless Heroes, Unknown Histories (A Local Historical Overview of the Strategies and Motifs of the Variable) Ana Peraica

Then perhaps the subject returns, not as illusion, but as fiction. A certain pleasure is derived from a way of imagining oneself as individual, of inventing a final rarest fiction: the fictive identity.

— Roland Barthes, 1973

The unknown, unnamed and anonymous are the pseudo-someones. They cannot be identified as someone in particular, because they may also be many. The only thing they cannot be is no one. But still, they're closer to being no one than to anyone in particular. Through their intervention in the historical axis they mask what is opposite, the process of becoming known (famous), through the opposite process, that I would name 'dis-identification' (disintegration of identity in all the ways of its production; political, social, cultural, psychological...). Most of the agents of history are unnamed. They write it, or history is written on them, though history doesn't write them in particular, except in terms of the 'mass' or the 'crowd'. In that sense, this is a homage to a mass society in which some creative individuals, not willing to identify themselves, are hidden.

The theme of this essay, in Barthesian terms, is the birth of the continuity of reading at the expense of the author and the history of the author in general. This piece is trying to go deeper in terms of 'the proper name', 'the institution of the author', 'authority' than just using these terms as narrative cliché. The discussion on the author in Western theory is extended, though not so much investigated in practical terms, in the art itself (except for several examples that might be mentioned before the 'neoistic' practice of the 1980s).

But even before this discussion the topic was already explored in depth practically in Eastern Europe. It had a certain success in the time of the

partisans — the graffiti authors with the underlining action of hiding their own or their comrades' identities. In a variety of ways, the practice of the anti-author was introduced — starting with the copyright problem (samizdats, tamizdats) and the use of pseudonyms to avoid censorship. But it wasn't only unofficial history that used a 'soft' definition of the author. Official history also practiced this. It was less about a pure use of the pseudonym and more a recipe for an artistic/political practice.

There is an intrinsic relation between the name and politics. The former was the necessary background for the arts from 1945, whether or not this was admitted in the artwork itself. Since the recent laws on authorial rights were passed, copyright has suddenly replaced the copyright-less principle. According to Croatia's post-socialist law on authorial rights (Authorial Work and the Author of the Penal Law, 1991), not only is the practice of falsification prohibited, but also that of pseudo-speech, a category under which some well-known artists from the not-so-distant 1980s would fall, including the Belgrade Malevich (Djordjević) and the 'Virus' project of Svebor Kranjc (Krantz).

At this point the histories of the illegal and the legal merge, providing grounds for an interpretation that would be unfamiliar to Western European chronology, a relationship which is usually found to be comparatively synchronous, but with a constant delay of inventions of styles.

Josip Seissel or Jo Klek (a pseudonym Seissel used between 1922 and 1925 when he belonged to the Zenitist movement)

fig. 7

The digressions of history (including art history) are most commonly written in the footnotes. In contrast

to the famous footnotes of Derrida, which remain curiosities in their own right, reading annotations of artworks can sometimes produce distortions in the interpretations of the main text.

The annotation, 'Josip Seissel, or Jo Klek, in the company of Božidar Tušek and some other people, with one stone on his head and the other in his hand' (Vjesnik 30 July 1999) accompanying a photograph of a happening at Brela beach, Croatia in the summer of 1949, is a pure biographical curiosity, a kind of blind footnote. The author of the text illustrated by the photograph is art historian Josip Depolo who claims it was the first happening in world history, one that took place even before the appearance of the concept in art itself. But following radical Barthesian methods, we can dispute Depolo's interpretation of happening — the photograph can't speak of more than the tactical description of the happening, indicated through; 'swimmers, stone on the head, stone in the hand', any more than it can the traditional game of Dalmatinska Zagora 'stone from the shoulder'. It could be the indication of the same game, which is still not happening in the photograph at all.

In concern to the protagonist, following the annotation, two historical axes are intertwined — one terminated, while the other one is invented from foreground to background and attached to the interpretation. Namely, the artist, a Zenitist (futurist), was the author of the first national abstract painting *Pafama* 1921, a sort of 'Great Nude' of Croatian art, under the pseudonym Jo Klek, but the painting had no impact until the rediscovery of abstraction after 1951. Seissel therefore usually occupies that paradoxical place in history reserved for dreamers and geniuses, either a lonely proto-modernist, making himself a loner for a whole period, or being attached to the work thirty years later by EXAT, the movement that institutionalised abstraction in local history. But even then, he is not a prototype, but an avant-garde artist, since the movement itself was more influenced by the dynamics of the international art scene. So, Josip Seissel as a protagonist of history is sliding between different points of historical narration. Paradoxically his story, if not written biographically, ends up at a later time where it hangs as a warning that something had already happened.

But still, the question might be asked: did Shakespeare invent Bacon, or was it vice versa? Or perhaps it was another author who invented both. The fact of the existence of Jo Klek is realised through his

relation to famous alter-identities of Jacques Durand (as Pierre Dupont) and Stendhal (as Henri Beyle), according to the relation of the author to the genre. Authorisation is done under different names, so we can repeatedly distinguish the 'proper name' from the 'name of the author', the first being the one that 'moves from the interior of a discourse to the real person outside who produced it' while the second 'remains on the outline of texts — separating one from the other, defining their form, and characterising their means of existence.' (Michel Foucault) There is the chain of 'proper name' equalling 'the name of the author', which again is 'the author of the name of the author' being the same as the 'proper name' but filling the other function (Josip Seissel and 'Josip Seissel' as the author of Jo Klek).

The situation is more obvious on the biographical axis, where through the use of a pseudonym Jo Klek actually doubles the story, creating a kind of pseudo-history. The question is always: is the use of a pseudonym actually the result of a wish to make another story that is not limited by time — a story that has no logical beginning or end points, a story with some deeper psychological roots? The fabrication of a new persona, a pseudo-persona, may also, as a second point, suggest some interesting (and broader) investigations with respect to schizo-analysis, as proposed by Guattari, the pseudonym representing the historical point of a social splitting. In this case it is a gap between the bio-story (biography) and artefactual-story (arti-graphy), the real and the official history.

This paradox may be of great use in realising the nature of photography, the real 'death mask' (Barthes, Sontag) or the death mask of the real. The face in the photograph functions as a signature, an imprint of the real that cannot be Jo Klek for sure, as he had no face, only the architect Josip Seissel. Even the stone itself has a more obvious relation to architecture, in this sense, than to his abstract painting.

For an analysis of this work the double biography must be taken into account, otherwise the radical consequences of the possible act might be omitted — the escape from the inside of one's own self, a kind of Socratic womb giving birth to the irrational, normative 'daimonion' — the non-institutionalised rule (or the unlawful norm itself). The relations of the architect to the Dada-movement, and of the painter to EXAT 51 are beyond doubt, but mutual references to the name and the avatar are also interesting, as one has influenced the architecture in

direct continuation, while the other is painting, after a period of being forgotten.

The fictional author, whom the real one (b. 1904 — d. 1987) gave a date of birth, did not actually have a narrative end.

Andrija Maurović or 'The Old Tomcat' (b. 1901, Boka Kdhorska — d. 1981, Zagreb)

fig. 2

From this time on it is a challenge to re-define socialist realism, which in practice is usually meant as a bad form of realistic painting, although actually its own programme is drawn on a broader base of social engagement and modernist demands with a successful history. Among the best examples one may mention the work of Andrija Maurović. Twice arrested for partisan activities, 'Red Maurović' became a biographical prototype of the post-revolutionary artist, and therefore fit the needs of society, as he made dogma visible. Starting with *Postcards from the Battlefield*, made immediately after the war, he proceeded with other commissions. Those, like the later kitsch paintings of natural motifs or cataclysms, made no headway into the history of the *beaux arts*. What's more, he was expelled from the professional societies. In that sense, he had almost the same biographical status as those anonymous artists making images of unknown partisans at the crossroads of many villages and cities. But Maurović entered history not through the main gate of establishment art, i.e. painting, but through the popular genre of the comic book.

There are two unavoidable points of reception for this genre in the territory of ex-Yugoslavia — Maurović's *The Old Tomcat* (in terms of the mode of production) and *Alan Ford* (in terms of actual reading). Their ongoing reception presents changes in the popular representation of heroes that has a particular relation to history, invented and distorted in all of them in such a way that it forms a nice curve around official history, which suffered from the same delusions. But just as mythomaniac (inventing myth, lying) stories have a relationship to mythology, so do histrionics (inventing history, falsification) have a relationship with history.

This is also obvious in the relationship of the work's author towards his own character, which uncovers a mythomaniac delusion. While *Alan Ford* was drawn under the generic historical identity designated by the term 'Magnus' (a medieval

signature: 'Magnus pictor fecit' — 'Done by a great artist'), and therefore explored the long history of the pseudonym, Maurović was a pure inversion of this position. While Roberto Raviola, alias Magnus, hid behind the signature of a skilful, a-historical but still unknown author, Maurović filled out his own character to create an avatar. In this way he became one of the most prominent examples of Proust's reverse positioning of biography and work.

Biographical information recounts how he used to call himself by the name of his most famous work, *The Old Tomcat*, so one of his wishes was to have that name carved on his gravestone, experimenting to the end with fictional biography. Furthermore, feeling the necessity to merge with his character, Maurović let his beard and moustache grow to become more similar to his own invention:

'The Old Tomcat' was from the first moment an old man, since I created him that way. Then, slowly, I was ageing too. Aren't the ways of humans strange; I created 'The Old Tomcat' so — in the end — I became 'The Old Tomcat'. That's what happens when someone delves in the depth of a human soul!

But the paradox is still more complex. The scenario wasn't written by Maurović, but the journalist Franjo M. Fuis (under the pseudonym Fra Mu Fu).

Dimitrije Bašičević as Mangelos

Manifestos (Zagreb 1978)

fig. 11, fig. 103, fig. 175

The appearance of the artist called Mangelos, later identified as art historian Dimitrije Bašičević, can be connected, in the context of comparative art history, to the 'second modern' period introduced in Croatia by the Gorgona group.

In this particular case there is a close relationship between Mangelos and the Gorgona group in the first modern period, similar to the one formed between Duchamp and Broodthaers. In that sense Mangelos's antecedent was Jo Klek. The similarities are obvious. The modernist application of the pseudonym, as illustrated in the division between Seissel and his alter ego, Klek, is clear, coupled with a rationalist approach to architecture and the irrationalist means of 'art' production. In Mangelos's case, the work is coherent and consistent, with the

theoretical work of the art historian Bašičević logically supplementing the artwork of Mangelos. There is only a formal separation. And it is precisely this formality, which provides the grounds for the appearance of the alter-author. The alternative ego exists, but becomes a unique solution provided by the second modern movement to the problem of totality in the first one. Namely, because the formal prohibition to cross the meta-artistic breach (based on an ethical norm being foisted as the law itself) is set from the outside of art production. This is in contrast to the inner contradictions of the activities of Seissel / Klek. In Mangelos's case the application of the pseudonym becomes a resolution. While Seissel bridges the mental barrier of modern premises by using two different axes (the rationalist inductive and irrationalist deductive methods), Mangelos crosses the formal border of this prohibition by using the illegal ground. It is therefore a histrionic move, a rhetorical entanglement with history.

The series of *Manifestos* 1978, written by Mangelos on a school chalk-board, the most interesting of which might be *The Manifesto on 'α'*, also demonstrate the solution of the second-modern movement. The texts themselves aren't programmatic, but poetic. *The Manifesto on 'α'* enters the domain of the double flow, again bridging two different realities, the cosmic and the particular (or the general and the specific), in which the dissolution of the algebraic problem of α , (being an ordinary dog, a canus simplex) also refers to the algebraic problem of Duchamp (art as 'x'), but introducing a new variable — the proper name (again) and the context of its application. A metonymy which functions as the translation of 'α' into a grand historical being, also functions as the file named Bašičević and his avatar Mangelos.

Alpha, as it is written on the board, 'The one that is legally forbidden access to the possibility of further evolution', draws us back to a discussion of the relations between the biological (and biography) to the artificial (and arti-graphy) in history. In that sense it appears in the same way that Derrida writes about the naming of God: 'As reference to just what name supposes to name beyond itself, the nameable beyond the name, the unnameable nameable.' As it is what is one of 'there where it is impossible to go. Over there, towards the name, towards the beyond of the name.' It is in precisely this way that the variable (of both 'α' and the name of Mangelos) functions.

Red Peristil and *Red Peristil*

Urban intervention, Split, 11 January 1968

fig. 48

Four youngsters are in front of the city café with their heads down. The citizens are prepared for the attack, a lynching. In front the group is washing the street, as seen on the photograph, which is the only document. It was during the night in January 1968, when a group of young artists that can be identified through the photo (P. Dulčić, S. Sumić, R. Djapić and D. Dokić) turned the main square of the Roman Palace red. Because of the assumed political context, the artists were hunted for days, and attacked in most of the newspapers. Only one art historian stood in their defence (Cvito Fisković). It was only years later, after the show *Mogućnosti '71* (*Possibilities '71*), that even the most reactionary theorists realised that urban interventions could be accepted as an art genre. By the time the work was recognised, most of the authors, whose real names were known only to a circle of friends, had died or vanished and a revision of information was no longer possible.

Since then, history has been totally inverted — with the event happening before the moment of recognition, instead of dis-identification in the face of the law or of a public lynching, we witness a hyper-identification with the protagonists. Progressively, with each retelling, more people are attached to the assumed list of artists (who were only half-identified in the press). The story grew in two directions; along the paths of immediate local history and of official art history. In the end a total of thirty protagonists were mentioned. But the lists didn't match. One list was characterised by elements of the urban Mediterranean macho milieu, and in that context drew reference to the lives of famous prostitutes, pimps and night creatures, while the other was inhabited by careerists, mystics and spiritualists. Still, in the determinants of the style (proper name — author — the author of the author which is a proper name) some of the major mythologists could be traced — Vladimir Dodig Trokut, whose anti-museum is a logical continuation of the practice of the Red Peristil, and Želimir Kipke, who attached some mystic elements to the story.

The group was named after the artwork, and there were even fractions invented within the group. All attempts were made to provide authorisation. This tale is a history of attempts to synchronize two sub-histories: the sub-histories of the proper name and the name of the author. Here the proper name, in contrast

to earlier examples, is far more important. Proper names were added, while the name of the author was invented. While both were specified, and named, the author of both remained under-cover, but his style was obvious, as both the names and the authors were derived from the first authorial discourse, which was now internalised. On the one side a profession, which mystifies the proper names of the authors (or name — style, bureaucracy), while on the other, the nameless mass inventing its own artists through the production of an urban myth.

Until the twentieth century, the history of unauthorised works (stories, folk tales, folk songs, etc.) had been one in which stories following an aural tradition came into the city (this transition is illustrated by Giovanni Boccaccio, who transferred popular tales into a narrative structure — ten friends telling ten stories). The author problem grew out of a need to professionalise the activity of authorship and in this new context the author was no longer unknown, but was still unidentified. Anyone could appear under the name of Homer, Hermes Trismegistus, and furthermore, many of them could be uncovered.

The resurrection of the author from the work carries into art history a need to address the problem of the mythological practices that remained following the passage of art into the era of the post-mythological. Red Peristil has no more or less a relation to the author than the Holy Scripture has to the saints to whom it is attributed. The actual authors — the acknowledged authors and the attributed authors — form three distinct spheres. Based predominantly on the reading of the author from the scripture, which produced nonsense out of factual possibilities, just as biographical figures later continued on within the discourse of modernism. Unfortunately or fortunately, it became a social practice — the reconstruction of the author, as in a crime story, produced the possibility of its creation inside an urban mass society hungry for a new dogmatic discourse.

To analyse this problem, notions of the 'proper name' and the 'author' aren't sufficient. Through Foucault's theory of the interdependence of discourse and the 'initiator of the discourse', who in fact is the author, we might conclude that a group was self-invented, or were not the original authors, based on both the criteria of the production of the author from the authorial discourse and the consequence of the coherency (homogeneity, filiations, reciprocal

explanation, authenticity, common utilitarianism). The discourse may invent the author, only becoming quasi-discursive, as the consequence of the discourse, not the first persona. Then the style also becomes discursive, as the discourse is emancipated and self-generative, or dynamic, in this way supporting the authorial function that is filled by a plurality of egos. The model produced is similar to the one Foucault derives from grammatology and narrative:

In a mathematical treatise, the ego who indicates the circumstances of composition in the preface is not identical, either in terms of his position or his function, to the 'I' who concludes a demonstration within the body of the text. The former implies a unique individual who, at a given time and place, succeeded in completing a project, whereas the latter indicates an instance and plan of demonstration that anyone could perform provided the same set of axioms, preliminary operations, and an identical set of symbols were used. It is also possible to locate the third ego: one who speaks of the goals of his investigations, the obstacles encountered, its results, and the problems yet to be solved, and this 'I' would function in a field of existing or future mathematical discourses ... The 'author-function' in such discourses operates so as to effect the simultaneous dispersion of the three egos.

The questions Foucault asks are contrary to the ones that had as their goal a classic identification, rather they are attempting to find the modules that govern the formation of discourse, interested not in its heroes but in issues: who is controlling it, which places are given to the possible subjects, or who can fulfill the various purposes of subjects. In short, as he noted: 'what matter who's speaking?' ('What does it matter who's speaking?').

Svebor Krantz

'Zagreb Virus', 22nd Salon of Youth, Zagreb 1990
fig. 150

In the same manner that R. Mutt managed to enter that salon in 1917, Svebor Krantz ('Zagreb Virus') managed to enter the 22nd Salon of Youth in Zagreb in 1990. This exhibition was 'unofficially' conceived as

one where 'anything goes', but at the same time the imagined ideal of 'no jury — no prices — no commercial tricks', wasn't followed — as was also the case in the show that refused that fountain.

If Duchamp's intervention amounted to the institution of institutional practice, the work of the young artist Svebor Krantz was an attempt to demystify its own failure.

Namely, the artist used different works to apply to the 22nd Salon of Youth under many names (Zvonko Cuker, Goranka Matić, Mario Matić, Sven Mraz, Aldo Prpić, Ante Soldo, Blanka Sekulić, Duško Trifunović, etc.). In contrast to R. Mutt, they were accepted. In the accompanying brochure the artist summarised his activity:

All basic conditions which establish a work of art have to be simulated to ensure access to the programme through its system of defence (the jury). It is to simulate authorship (individuality, personal data), form (e.g. a bit of paint on canvas) and the so-called spirit of the work (which boils down to a psychological identification with various trends or other popular intellectual clichés)... At the moment when the virus gained enough 'quality' to pass through its access, it was chosen to participate in the exhibition of equally valid works of art. At this point, identification of the virus and the other works degrades the last ones a lot. It is actually the criteria of choice and quality, which are declining and therefore the works of art have to lose the honour of being 'chosen'.

It may seem that the author himself mixed up the notion of authorship belonging to the author, with the notion of the biographical 'proper name', a mix-up which continues within the context of a critique of institutional art practices.

His reference to new media with the metaphor of a computer virus capable of hiding behind files, and even arriving from known senders, is interesting. A lot of theory in the 1980s and 1990s has been concerned with a form of remote communication that produces the effect of a multiple person (in situ) but which also allows a kind of manipulation through avatars (s. Turkle, s. Stone and others), but this development was routinely presented in a negative light. The positive

view was only provided by followers of neoism, a movement that emerged during the 1980s and reached its peak in the 1990s. The neoists introduced strategies of multiple names or multiple personas behind a single name, enlarging on the subjects of authorship and the author. One of the most famous examples of using such a practice, especially related to forgery, was Luther Blissett's plagiaristic work — the fake Hakim Bey (the 'real' Hakim Bey is also a figure writing under a pseudonym). The work of Svebor Krantz also falls under this anti-ethical aesthetic.

There is still one question of consistency to be solved — it's not so much a matter of how one can be a 'singular plural' but rather a question of how much there is which is inseparable from the singular — the plurality of quality.

Feral Tribune Magazine

fig. 167

The logic of one history may approve the other. It is unbelievable to many, dealing with different branches of history, that playing either a fool or an artist or both may cover political liability under the legal status of the madness of an 'art piece'. Then using the freedom of arts in rigid times arriving as foolishness at the maximum, which at the same time crosses the legal possibility of speech, and therefore falls under a completely different legal status. Many modernist artists have tested this marginal position of the art world against the political stage, playing with 'innocence' within the frames of the white rooms of madhouses and the white cube of the gallery or museum.

The magazine *Feral Tribune*, which during the 1990s was one of the rare free media voices in Croatia (remember this was at a time when Croatian artists made shows paraphrased as 'Art against War' and 'My Bleeding Country', and organised pathetic societies to fight with paintbrushes, uncritically accepting the political conditions produced by such gestures).

Feral Tribune was produced under the conditions of the strict press controls of war-time, in which usually the only free space or non-censured space is the non-textual expression. 'Grand history' is a verbal chain, and the hyper-textualisation of laws was introduced by bureaucracy — a domain that hardly included visual documents (except through Bertillon's invention of ID photography). The magazine, in the daily newspaper format, was publishing texts and photo-comments, the

latter usually being more radical, deconstructing the discourse of the Other formed within war-time.

This was already practiced in photomontage, as it emerged as a genre in the modern period. Photomontage developed as a political vehicle, not only for John Heartfield but also other German modernists such as Hannah Höch, as well as for Russian constructivists (Rodchenko, El Lissitzky, etc.), who used this method for propaganda purposes. More recently the American artist Martha Rosler made anti-Vietnam War montages, and later Peter Kennard applied this method against the Cold War of the 1980s. But photomontage as a genre founded on the popular motif of the caricature also appeared during times of oppression (for example in fanzines in Russia and Argentina).

But the difference between *Feral Tribune* and the ancestors I mentioned above is the type of humour used — no longer a soft humour, but a sarcastic black humour similar to the one that the group RTMarkt used in its rogue sites against George W. Bush, or in their initiative named Barbie Doll Liberation.

The cover page of the *Feral Tribune* was one of the most reprinted in the history of journalism. Its unique intervention in the political field makes it not so much an artwork as the *art sortie* of the decade.

Sanja Iveković

GEN XX

Media interventions in magazines — *Arkzin*, *Zaposlena*, *Frakcija*, *Kruh i ruže* and *Kontura* 1997–8
fig. 205

Sanja Iveković's *GEN XX*, *People's Heroines* is a series of fashion photographs of women titled with the names of national heroes. Partisans with short statements on the way they were persecuted, directly connected not only to the problems of women (as anonymous agents of civilisation before the birth of emancipatory movements), but also to heroes. Through a fusion of the composite image the original advertisement is transformed into its opposite: a death certificate.

In the context of feminist groups, some would recognise that the foundations of this work is the Antifascist Women's Front (AFŽ), the first anti-erotic women's group in Yugoslavia (working on the equality of the sexes, and consequently succeeding in de-sexualising the image of the woman), which was founded during World War II and continued its political work throughout the post-war period.

The main question is whether art and the image

of the face and their roles in society identify a person. A series of heroes whose names were ubiquitous during socialist times (Nada Dimić, Dragica Končar, etc.), as most people in the 1990s were unaware of the historical role of the person identified with these names, are contrasted in a series of fashion photographs. In this way two histories of women are balanced with the problems created by a passive object and an active intervening agent, both serving history, and in so doing becoming forgettable, describing two points of historical anonymity. The author publishes work in magazines, which is unsigned, thus this becomes the third example of a presentation of anonymity. The author is both the object of an erotic act of intervening and of a modernist understanding of the analysis of the work and of the author as the intervening agent in a cultural body. This merges the two contradictory positions, of being both the subject and object. The relation of the name to the unnamed — the name of the unknown — and the name of the one that is referring to both unnamed and unknown becomes complex. There is a similar complexity in the argument Foucault develops when analysing Magritte's work, *Ceci n'est pas une pipe*. Here it is not playing with names but rather with notions of the unknown. Authorship and identification, two 'who's' aren't connected, though in ordinary grammar they both appear in the nominative, as subjects. They split the function of the proper name as the subject and object.

The general xenophobia of socialism, where NN (None Named) becomes the main conspirator against which the annual militant practice of war is exercised (NNNI: 'ništa nas ne smije iznenaditi' — 'nothing should surprise us'), was also the subject of other works by Sanja Iveković, referring to the paranoia of post-socialist times, indeed, any reference to the socialist past. Already since her classic *Trokut* 1979, in which she was masturbating while reading a book on political resistance and drinking whisky, whilst Yugoslavian president Tito was passing through the streets, Iveković was meeting state paranoia. Another example mentioned by Sanja Iveković in one conversation is related to a totally hilarious attempt by the inhabitants of the street of the 'Unknown Heroine' in Zagreb to change its name. This happened at a time when the names of many public places were being revised, because the inhabitants assumed that the unknown heroine might be a partisan heroine. This was also the subject of a work

by Slaven Tolj titled *Pissed Off by the Square ...* (shown in Gallery PM in Zagreb in 1999), in which the building of the Gallery placed on the square that changed its name with each government was surrounded with detonation mines. This was an intervention in a building that had changed its name, along with the square on which the building is situated. The work dealt with political nominalism, with the absurdity of authority in a way similar to the practice of Humpty Dumpty concerning the explanation of meaning and name.

Anonymous Author and 'The Manager'

Urban intervention, Split, 11 January 1998 and media installation, 33rd Zagreb Salon of Arts, Zagreb 1998
fig. 211

History can move in a curvilinear direction and rehears itself again. Thirty years later someone painted Peristil again, but this time in black. A pitiable note was left.

Among the many careerists that wanted to officially annotate the myth of Red Peristil, the mayor's office of the city of Split received two official applications to cover the Peristil again (one with animal blood, the other with red paint) as homage to the group. Neither of these requests was approved, but a few years earlier a covering of green carpet was legally allowed. Finally, a round black version appeared, but illegally. The square was painted with a black circle in the middle. Though logically invoking Malevich's rhetorics of the red and black, it was actually more reminiscent of Stella's less geometric approach. The square was painted in a rush.

The artist escaped, wasn't caught and remains unknown. Once again, a discussion developed, but this time informed art historians and critics reacted positively, as if trying to clear their conscience for the lynching of the protagonists of the Red Peristil. City leaders, on the other hand, reacted negatively, as of course black, the colour used for nationalist uniforms in World War II, was this time recalled in the times of post-war post-socialism. It all happened as a reworking of history.

Again the arguments lasted for days, and many of the artists were called in for police interviews. In the end documentation of the whole polemical exercise was entered into the 33rd Zagreb Salon, receiving an award. The work received the third prize and was submitted anonymously — thus fulfilling the aim of

Goran Trbuljak when he asked the galleries to participate in the *Anonymous Artist* project. The anonymous author was then identified, at least by the jury, and the 'superstition of names' of the institutional art world was re-activated as soon as the originators identified themselves.

Since there was a threat that the one who collected the award would be prosecuted, the prize was not collected by 'him' but by 'him as his own manager', though everyone knew it was the same person. This person, being neutral, appearing only as a representative, was out of the reach of any law referring to the material damage to the monument. The author was covered, at the same time de-authorising the work, and therefore not legally responsible.

Whether or not the anonymous should assume his identity once the action is prosecuted, is more of an ethical than aesthetic decision, still in the context of activism quite crucial. Following the case of Alexander Brener's arrest for his intervention exacted upon Malevich's painting, around the same time; the author of the author (or the proper name) showed cowardice in the sense of historical bravery, as he remained anonymous and escaped justice. So, the difference between the Red Peristil and the Black one was in taking up the legal aspect of the authorship of the act of vandalism. Namely, the vanished author of Black Peristil (or his 'manager' appearing at the prize-giving ceremony at the Salon of Youth) didn't accept the legal consequences of the intervention, as his 'ancestors' of the original had done. They paid the legal fee of 50DM as punishment for their act (that was the equivalent of two days in prison at that time).

At the end of the nineteenth century an obvious paradox emerged in the making of any law on authorship. This centres on the fact that it refers not to the proper name, but to the author, who may not actually be guilty, because she or he is not a real person. Rather it is the person behind the author that is guilty. This paradox is actually a consequence of the longer history of the split between the religious and social status of the artist, which intensified in the twentieth century:

In our culture... discourse was not originally a thing, a product, or a possession, but an action situated in a bipolar field of the sacred and profane, lawful and unlawful, religious and blasphemous.

— Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author'

The schizoid split of the author (this time not a split of the self) produced a new paradigm of the author: the representative of the author (the artist-manager as a post-industrial, global multi-mediated phenomenon in the institutional history of art) in contrast to the anonymous relation of the author.

Finally, if something could be blamed, according to both copyright and authorship laws, it would be an intervention in the meaning of the original work, the Red Peristil. The paradox of this situation, not only because of the painting but also the method, is an inversion of Dambek's movie *Master's Game* 1997, that elaborates on the ethical problem of one who paints over the work of another, becoming angry once it is done to him.

A Tree without an Author

Urban intervention, work in progress at the entrance to the Split Civil Hospital, 1990s

fig. 225

An intervention exacted upon a tree might introduce another question — that of the curator as author, applying a theory in the name of art, and as an alibi of quasi-distribution. One could choose an art piece in a regular method or proclaim one to be analysed in the context of art.

For more than a decade pieces of chewing gum have been stuck to a tree, covering it from the top to the bottom, indicating not only the passers-by but also the types of gums available on the post-socialist market and ways of communication — i.e. exploring ways of writing messages.

The basis for the explanation is to be found between two definitions of the artwork: institutional modernist theory claiming 'everything is art' (if in a known context) and the altruistic postmodern definition claiming 'everyone is an artist'. The first of these may be called, following Michel Foucault in 'What is an Author', the 'dilemma of the artwork', of everyone in particular, and the second, 'the dilemma of the author', of everyone in general.

Between these two positions the question should be asked: if by everything we mean 'something' or 'anything', and if by 'everyone' do we mean 'everyone in particular' (some unnamed ones) or 'everyone in general' (anyone).

In the given example of the tree intervention, 'the dilemma of the artwork' can be resolved in a detailed theoretical pseudo-analysis (justifying the 'art

as art') that would conclude that chewing gum couldn't be anything other than a politically incorrect anti-global (or anti-American if signs are taken literally: tree, chewing gum) alternative expression, and therefore art, of anonymous mass. The 'dilemma of the author' may be rescued in the continuity of the 'author', whose work appears with completely impossible chronology in different locations, being translocated by the anonymous mass that has no need to identify itself, on the other location. Appearing as 'arty' (or 'art-ish') and having a pseudo-biographical continuity, this tree may be seen as art.

But the first dilemma, a certain 'curse' of the 'white cube', leads to a precisely inverted situation from the one that art practice tried to establish — the criteria of quality. Anartism (the negation of art at all) was not concerned with the problem of authorship. At the same time the second dilemma produces an authorised quality question; as Thierry de Duve asked in *Kant after Duchamp*:

Why would a democratic grouping of free individuals produce art of ipso facto inferior quality to that which has been screened by the trained eye of a dealer less interested in commerce than in purist aesthetics?

Furthermore, outside of the institutional and optimistic ontology present within two border definitions of the modern (proto- and post-), another question arises: the definition of the act alone that is artistic. The problem, in the end, is which would be the author of the author. In recent history this place was also opened to another branch of authors — the curators. Being outside of the institutional and optimistic ontology both present in border definitions of modern (proto- and post-) the definition of an act as artistic, which does not ask if something was at all thought as an artistic act (both definitions do), the problem becomes the inauguration of the art from the outside.

Finally, this is the resolution of Mangelos's dilemma: a pure authority of the author, at a certain point passed on to curators, deciding who is the author, not the artist. The condition of art has become more than a cognitive author-related issue, it has become literally political, depending on authority rights being taken further than the rights of the author. The cognitive explanation of art, the awareness of the creation, as to what is meant to be art vanishes

in front of what is accepted as art. It arrives at the point where no art existed, although there were artefacts produced, as was the case in the early drawings and paintings labelled 'art' by a later profiled discipline — art history. This doesn't mean it fell into a post-historic hole, though, since history still moves without the authors.

The question would be if the power of authority (in this deliberate choice) was practiced without a required critical aspect. For this example, I may conclude (at least for this historical point) by invoking the modernist theory that announced the process of de-iconization of the author after her or his 'death' as Barthes has written. That process represents the necessary drawing back to the magic loop of the history of art into anonymity, the last chapter of which was written with the neoistic use of the name as a social construct for many individuals.

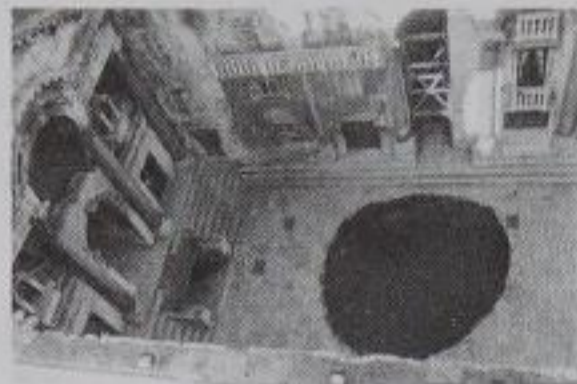
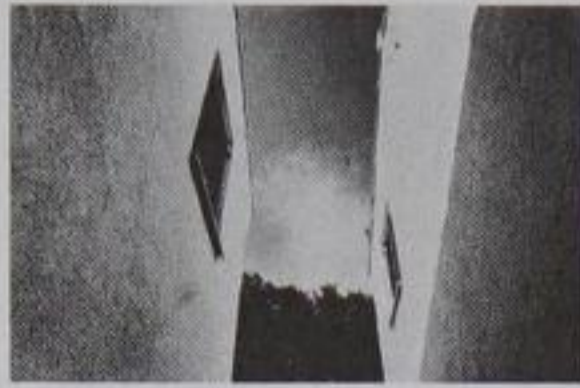
The point from which neither the author can be read through the work, or the work through the author, is the point where the author becomes a symbol. This is the point where one is able to talk, not programmatically, about changes in the authors' positions through time.

The text on the project Pensioner Tihomir Simčić is not available because of disparate resources that may lead not only to historical misunderstandings, but also to legal prohibitions. It is better not to have a history than make another historical mistake.

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From left to right and top to bottom:

Josip Seissel/ Jo Klek *Untitled* 1949

Andrija Maurović *The Old Tomcat* est. 1937

Dimitrije Bašičević/ Mangelos *Manifest on 'a'* 1978

Red Peristil *Red Peristil* 1968

Aldo Prpić/ Svebor Krantz *Untitled* from the series
Zagreb Virus 1990

Feral Tribune *Did we fight for that?* 1993

Sanja Iveković *Gen XX — Dragica Končar* 1997–8

Anonymous Author and 'The Manager' *Untitled* 1998

A Tree without an Author Urban intervention by
the citizens of Split 1990s

Untitled

Branka Stipančić

The Gorgona group and Josip Vaništa
(b. 1924 Karlovac. Lives and works in Zagreb.)

fig. 38

The Gorgona group was active in Zagreb from 1959 – 66. The founder was the painter Josip Vaništa and the group members were: the painters Julije Knifer, Marijan Jevšovar and Đuro Seder; the art historians Radoslav Putar, Matko Meštrović and Dimitrije Bašičević-Mangelos; the sculptor Ivan Kožarić and the architect Miljenko Horvat. They were characterised by an open artistic stance, irony and subversiveness towards the inherited situation in art and a struggle to achieve an art form that would radicalise the very concept of art and artistic behaviour. Their profile as a group was marked by self-denial and utter disinterest in public participation in the social life of their local environment hence, as 'Gorgonians' they remained unknown. Their activity, today, is regarded as quite an exceptional phenomenon that shares some of the spiritual and idiomatic elements characteristic of Fluxus and conceptual art.

Besides their own work in painting and sculpture, the group organised exhibitions (in the gallery, Studio G), published the anti-review magazine *Gorgona*, proposed numerous ideas and projects, as well as developing various forms of artistic communication. A number of activities in everyday life, such as meetings of the group members, their mutual correspondence, and the walks they took together were considered art events. The group stressed the linguistic nature of the language of art, particularly evident in the works titled *Misli za mjesec* (*Thoughts for the Month*), i.e. a selection of quotes drawn from philosophy, literature and art that were deemed similar to the sensibility of Gorgona, and which the group members mailed to each other. Their concepts and ideas were frequently poetic, utopian, and at times only verbal.

The spiritual condition of Gorgona was perhaps best expressed by Vaništa in a text written in 1961:

The objectives of Gorgona have been liberated from any psychological or symbolic meaning. * Gorgona is for absolute transience in art. * Gorgona seeks neither a work nor a result in art. * Gorgona is contradictory. * Gorgona is defined as the sum of its possible interpretations. * Gorgona's world is the field of vision. * Gorgona's thought is serious and scant. * I'm afraid it has been created naturally.

An immaterial sensibility was always congenial to the Gorgona members. Many of them (Josip Vaništa, Ivan Kožarić, Dimitrije Bašičević-Mangelos) substituted a verbal equivalent, a precise and unequivocal code, for a painting, as Vaništa himself said: 'Linguistic formulation is sufficient.' Vaništa gave verbal, logical structure an advantage over material structure and manual execution, showing a radicalism that was entirely unknown to the Croatian art scene.

In 1964, instead of making a work, he presented *Painting 1964* with the following text:

Horizontal Canvas
Width 180 cm
Height 140 cm
Entire Surface White
A Silver Line (Width 180 cm, Height 3 cm)
Flows Horizontally across the Middle
of the Canvas

In other projects he went a step further, suggesting an *Exhibition without an Exhibition* (in Studio G 1964) that would display nothing but descriptions of works by Gorgonians.

The paintings, drawings or sculptures by the Gorgona group reflect a specific poesy that frequently evokes emptiness, non-picturesqueness, monotony and influences that we recognise in the philosophy of Zen, anti-art, the philosophy of the absurd, and in individual works by Zero group. In the early 1960s when the group was active, the paintings of Julije Knifer, Marijan Jevšovar and Dimitrije Bašičević-Mangelos were called anti-paintings by their authors, meanwhile Ivan Kožarić proposed utopian projects.

Through its 'iconoclastic will' and tendency to dematerialise art, Gorgona represented what was at the time an entirely new form of art activity in Croatia. Unfortunately, the group's activities remained unknown until 1977, when Nena Dimitrijević prepared an exhibition (and catalogue) in the Gallery of Contemporary Art in Zagreb and at the Städtisches Museum Abteiberg in Mönchengladbach. Therefore Gorgona only began to be influential to other artists from the end of the 1970s.

Gorgona Anti-Review, n° 1–11, Zagreb 1961–6

publisher: Josip Vaništa & artists

fig. 22

The initiative for launching the Gorgona Anti-Review came from Josip Vaništa, the founder of the Gorgona group. Between 1961–6, eleven issues were published in Zagreb, with the participation of: Josip Vaništa, Marijan Jevšovar, Julije Knifer, Victor Vasarely, Ivan Kožarić, Miljenko Horvat, Harold Pinter and Dieter Roth. Issues by Piero Manzoni, Đuro Seder, Enzo Mario, Ivan Čižmek and others were prepared but never published. *Gorgona* was called an anti-review in order to underline its difference to what is normally considered an art magazine; it neither contributed information about art nor offered any reproductions of works of art. Every issue of *Gorgona* contained the work of only one artist and was a work of art realised in the print medium. It was not until a few years later that Clive Philpot and Germano Celant introduced the term 'artist book', to be followed by the expression 'artist review', which were then entered into the history of art as forms of artistic expression. The term 'anti' may be understood as being in harmony with the prevailing attitude of the group in denying official art trends, but there was also an awareness amongst group members that their works were difficult to accept or were even unacceptable as art. Also, 'anti' may be understood in the context of their emphasising the terms 'anti-art' and 'anti-painting', as well as *Gorgona's* affinity to the

literature of the absurd, 'anti-drama' or 'anti-film'.

The Gorgona Anti-Review was authentic. It was created as a way of crossing the boundaries of art between the 'Gorgonian walks', 'Gorgonian mail' and the different individual activities of the group members. Simple in form, with an emphasis on conceptual works to fit the form of a review and its multiplication, Gorgona Anti-Review contributed first-hand rather than obtained information on a work of art. From start to finish, it was produced by the artists themselves or by Josip Vaništa who distributed the review.

'*Gorgona* is for absolute transience in art, *Gorgona* seeks neither a work nor a result ...,' defines Vaništa. Presumably this is the reason it was able to open the door to the unknown without prejudice. Compared to other reviews published by artists in this period, *Gorgona* retained a special place. While Roth's magazine *Spiral* (1953–64) offered woodcuts and linocuts by famous artists printed on luxury paper, Spoerri's more modest *Material* (1957–9) published visual poetry and Manzoni and Castellani's *Azimuth* (1959–60) issued works by various artists, every issue of *Gorgona* was the work of a single artist, unique in concept and medium.

Gorgona was distributed by mail. The professional contacts that Josip Vaništa, in particular, established with artists such as Dieter Roth, Piero Manzoni, Lucio Fontana, Robert Rauschenberg and others testify to an awareness of the publication's character and importance. In 1968, with the help of the well-known publisher and bookseller George Wittenborn, *Gorgona* reached the library of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. And yet, to this day, Gorgona Anti-Review is largely unknown and has not been given its appropriate place in the history of art.

Dimitrije Bašičević / Mangelos

(b. 1921 Šid — d. 1987 Zagreb)

fig. 98

Dimitrije Bašičević was an art historian, critic and curator in the Galerije grada Zagreba (Galleries of the City of Zagreb). At the same time, though less known, he was an artist who worked under the pseudonym Mangelos (after a village near his birthplace of Šid). According to his later publications, his oeuvre started in the post-war period with the group of works: *Paysages de la mort*, *Paysages de la guerre*, *Paysages*, *Tabula Rasa* (black and white monochrome surfaces beneath which texts are written), which he used to express a state of oblivion and the setting for a new beginning. Using the

positions of Gorgona's anti-art, in the series *Pythagoras*, *Anti-peinture* and *Abecede* in the 1950s, Mangelos denied painting emphasising instead the rational factors in art. He later wrote ideas, poetry ('no-stories') and manifestos using only three colours — red, black and white — in calligraphy between drawn lines. He used a hybrid form of writing and painting in notebooks, on wooden boards and on globes. In the 1970s, Dimitrije Bašičević, in his role as curator, monitored conceptual and media art, especially photography, but as an artist inclined more towards defining terms and presenting ideas. Supported at the same time by a younger generation of artists, he showed his works more in alternative exhibition spaces run by artists. Just as before, Mangelos was in dialogue, or rather in dispute with everything he was studying; his scale was broad, from philosophy and art, to psychoanalysis, biology, etc.

Texts were a specific form of expressing highly subjective points of view with which he affirmed his theories about the development of society and non-development of art, i.e. about the crisis and death of art. He explained this as the rift between two civilisations: the 'handmade' and the 'machine', the former being based on the 'old naïve and metaphoric' and the latter on 'functional' thought. Humour and irony were always present — in exhibiting thoughts, in the discrepancy between an exaggerated message and a banal sentence, in scorning authority, in mixing different foreign languages, particularly German, French and English. Because he was aware that such writing did not reflect the precision of the functional thoughts being advocated, his manifestos became increasingly succinct (especially those written on globes). He wanted to reduce information to the shortest possible form, to a clear and precise thought, a 'super-Wittgensteinian thought', as he himself put it.

Chronologically, Mangelos's work coincided with a sense of the absurd in existentialist nihilism, the independent intellectual spirit of the Gorgona group, the overstepping of media boundaries by Fluxus, and, as regards the use of language and philosophical thinking, conceptualism. The work of Mangelos creates a specific area of freedom that he conquered for himself and that he called 'NO-ART'.

Julije Knifer

(b. 1924 Osijek — d. 2004 Paris)

fig. 23

Obsessively repeating one motif, the motif of the meanderer over a period of forty years in his seemingly

uniform oeuvre Julije Knifer has produced different interpretations behind which every succeeding generation sees new meaning and impetus. Since he began painting at the end of the 1950s, Knifer's work has been viewed under the auspices of geometric abstraction following the trail of the group EXAT 51. In the 1960s as a neo-constructivist in the context of New Tendencies, his work acquired a specific spiritual connotation of anti-art in the Gorgona group (Knifer was a Gorgona group member from 1959 to 1966). Conceptualism later added new meaning to Knifer's work; and equally so, contact with minimalism changed the circumstances in which the understanding of his art took place. However, consistently planned and performed work such as his could not be placed or interpreted within any one trend, also Knifer always disassociated himself from painters who were formally similar to him.

Knifer believed that a form of anti-painting could be achieved by reducing the visual aspect of a painting, using minimal resources and extreme contrasts (black and white). His painting is based on categories such as repetition, monotony, flow, rhythm, endless patience, asceticism, 'non-development'. Knifer's stance is well known: 'The chronology and schedule of my works are of no consequence. I have probably already finished my last paintings, but perhaps haven't done my first.' He elaborates, 'The physical form of a "painting" at the same time implied the final spiritual phase of an initial idea. Today's compositions carry in them the same spiritual background and the same spiritual structure as in those years...' (from *Zapisi (Entries)* 1977).

Knifer's oeuvre, which consists of paintings, drawings and murals appears as an endless stream of 'interrupted' meanderings and is a metaphor for a behavioural and ethical position. His work may, in a way, be compared to that of his contemporary artists whose interest focused on time and repetition: for example, the work of Roman Opalka which 'measures' the passage of time through the writing of rows of numbers on paintings, or with On Kawara's date-paintings, with Hanne Darboven's system of daily diagram texts, or with artists such as Ad Reinhardt, who considered the practice of painting to be a repetition of a reduced visual vocabulary, some kind of ritual and an accentuated conceptual act.

There are only a few Croatian contemporary artists who are as influential to younger generations of artists as Knifer is. When he still lived in Croatia

(he had been a resident of Paris since 1994), he often socialised with young artists. The artistic models he established were not repeated; instead he exerted his influence through his moral integrity and his views on art.

Ivan Kožarić

(b. 1921 Petrinja. Lives and works in Zagreb.)

fig. 26

Ivan Kožarić is known for having open views and for striving to radicalise the very concept of art. From the beginning of his career in the Gorgona group (1959 – 66) to now, as an octogenarian artist he continues his research and work with unabated energy. His oeuvre is extensive and extends in so many different directions that it is difficult to encompass. This text describes only one aspect of this work: the concept of emptiness; a concept that still provides incentive and ideas today.

A work by Ivan Kožarić from 1963 consists of the following written instructions for projects:

Collectively make plaster casts of the inside of the heads of all Gorgonians, nobody may be excused. Discreetly make casts of the inside of several automobiles, the inside of an efficiency apartment, tree trunks, the inside of a park, etc. Basically, of all significant cavities in our city.

This verbal, poetic project describes absence. It emphasises the concept of emptiness, is close to Zen ideas, the absurdity of existentialist literature and anti-art as supported by the members of the Gorgona group. From a sculptural point of view, this was a desire to change emptiness, a negative volume, into sculpture, a positive volume. If Kožarić's idea to make a cast of an efficiency apartment's empty space is compared to some works by renowned artists in the 1990s, for example, Rachel Whiteread, *Untitled/House* 1993 (a cement cast of the inside of an entire house), Kožarić's project, given the year of its origin, was unfeasible to the artist himself and remained a utopian idea. Whiteread's house is a sculpture of space, just as Kožarić's sculpture *Isječak rijeke (A Segment of the River)* 1959, is a sculpture of 'arrested' water, a print of the elusive flow of a river. Kožarić's project was typical of the 1960s: ideas that are not deficient in spectacular elements but in the possibility of realisation.

Another project by Ivan Kožarić on the subject of the negative may be perceived today as 'precursory' — *Rezanje Sljemena (Slicing off Sljeme)* 1960, the carving of a semi-circular excavation in a hill near Zagreb. Ten years later this work would have been called concept art or, if approved and subsidised, land art. The hill would become the material to be shaped; the artist would intervene in the natural form and create a new constellation. At the time it was just a highly poetic, utopian idea, drafted as a sketch. In relation to the idea of emptiness, Kožarić was always interested in its opposite, the idea of mass. Throughout his career he exhibited old and new sculptures, and items from everyday life that he treated equally, in galleries and museums. At *Documenta II*, Kassel 2002, the artist exhibited absolutely everything to be found in his studio.

Tomislav Gotovac

(b. 1937 Sombor. Lives and works in Zagreb.)

fig. 29

Tomislav Gotovac, a film director with an important oeuvre in 'structuralist' films including *Prijepodne jednog fauna (The Forenoon of a Faun)* 1963, *Pravac (Direction)* and *Kružnica (Circle)* both 1964, *Glenn Miller* 1977 and others, is also an artist and performer. His ideas on life and art became radicalised in the early 1960s, and demonstrated his artist's position of 'speaking in the first person' and of outlining his works as events that mirror everyday life. Collages and photographs dating from the early 1960s include the 'recording' and 'cataloging' of fragments of reality, which Gotovac uses as his primary material, as a selection of strong visual signs that participate in the aesthetics of a work. No matter what medium Gotovac chooses, it is always a priority for him to work with the body. Gotovac was the author of the first happening in the former Yugoslavia with his *Happ naš — Happening (Our Hap — Happening)*, which took place in Zagreb in 1967. He carried out the first *Streaking* (Belgrade 1971), and many other performances. Sensitive to the time and space in which he worked, Gotovac introduced social and political subjects into his artistic discourse. In this he entered into a critical dialogue using contemporary language. Many of his performances appeared to be simple Fluxus events — *Čitanje novina (Reading newspapers)*, *Gledanje televizije (Watching television)*, *Čišćenje ulice (Sweeping streets)*, *Prošenje (Molim*

milodar! Hvala! Umjetnik u prosenju (Begging/Can You Spare a Dime? Thank You! The Begging Artists) all took place in the 1980s. But since they were performed in public, on the street, in a communist country and in specific situations — they nonetheless had a marked subversive note. Although Gotovac was never ‘innocent’ in his actions politicisation was deduced more from the context. Aware that he could carry out performances in a ‘public sphere that is under pressure’ only if he touched indirectly on political subjects and if the sexual element was moderate, Gotovac paid no heed to that fact, and so his performances frequently ended in a police precinct.

On the other hand, many of his activities have been set in direct relation to the films to which the artist dedicated his works and which he mirrored. Being a film director by profession, one might say, metaphorically speaking, that he writes the screenplay, directs and acts in all his works. He developed an artistic strategy called ‘paranoia view art’, according to which everything in our lives is preordained and directed somewhere else, somewhere outside our scope of possible action. Prohibitions everywhere around us, and freedom restricted to between point A and point B. ‘Freedom is the luck of most people, so why not act anarchically?’ To this day Gotovac hasn’t lost his desire to act subversively, which always makes his work exciting.

Goran Trbuljak

(b. 1948 Varaždin. Lives and works in Zagreb.)

fig. 170

Goran Trbuljak, a conceptualist artist, photographer and cinematographer, became active toward the end of the 1960s. Between 1969 and 1971 he collaborated with Braco Dimitrijević. Trbuljak was interested in the idea that in issues of authorship and anonymity, the originality of a work of art, and artistic context, particularly the gallery mechanism that determine the status of an artwork, everybody could be an artist. Four posters, which were in fact four solo exhibitions by Trbuljak, speak best about his art strategy in the 1970s. The texts were as follows:

I Do Not Wish To Show Anything New
and Original
(GSC — Student Culture Gallery, Zagreb 1971)

The Fact That Someone Has a Chance To Make
An Exhibition Is More Important Than What

Will Be Exhibited At That Show
(GSU — Gallery of Contemporary Art,
Zagreb 1973)

With This Exhibition I Am Demonstrating
The Continuity Of My Work
(GSU Studio, Zagreb 1979)

A Retrospective
(Salon, MSU — Museum of Contemporary Art,
Belgrade 1981)

The latter example was simply a poster on which the three previous phrases were printed. Trbuljak researches the space around and behind an art object, his objective is to demystify the ‘institution of art’ and subversive activity in the system of culture. He investigates that which refers to art, so the forms of his works are different: calling cards that are left for gallery workers, opinion polls that require a response or, indeed, a referendum (in Zagreb 1972) in which passers-by are to decide whether Goran Trbuljak is an artist or not. Humour and self-deprecating irony play a very important role in the work. In 1974, Trbuljak entered into a dialogue with painting: he simulated painting on the window of an art store, and painted above an empty canvas set on an easel. As an amateur artist Trbuljak painted on Sundays and a series of photographs documenting action is called *Nedjeljno slikarstvo (Sunday Painting)* 1974. Trbuljak, then, developed the ‘event’ of Sunday painting into static objects, placing canvases in glass-protected boxes, which he surrounded with various materials and interventions. In an amusing analysis of painting as the conceptualist taboo Trbuljak continues a debate about contemporary painting as a medium which has been attacked and spoken about ironically but which still shows its viability.

Goran Trbuljak was the first artist in Croatia to question the meaning of exhibiting work within the gallery system, and the status of an artist as part of this, integrating such questions into his art. Every new step in art was always an ethical issue for Trbuljak. His influence on the generation of post-conceptual artists in the mid 1970s was decisive.

Mladen Stilinović

(b. 1947 Belgrade. Lives and works in Zagreb.)

fig. 169

The principal theme of Mladen Stilinović’s works, since the mid 1970s, when he transferred from experimental

movies to visual art, and joined the post-conceptual scene, is different power relations: power as the subject of politics, ideology, art; power drawn into the most delicate mechanisms of everyday life. In focusing his attention on studying languages, different mythologies and symbols, he criticises political speech and its fragmentation in society, frequently using irony, paradox and manipulation. Stilinović most frequently talks about popular contemporary myths regarding: time, money, work, communications thereby touching on something that is intact, because time must not be wasted, money must not be destroyed, work is an indisputable virtue, and language serves to communicate. Yet the artist tries to deny this. His lectures on laziness, his manipulation of the terms 'work' and 'time', works in which money serves as ordinary paper, and lectures on a lack of understanding, are well known. For Stilinović language is, to borrow the words of Mikhail Bakhtin, an 'ideological phenomenon par excellence'.

The basic ideological forms of communication through symbols are perhaps best explained by using words as a material, and so the artist opens his 'debate' on the truth and falsehood of every linguistic utterance and every ideological symbol. In the 1970s and 1980s, Stilinović drew his themes from socialist society; deciphering verbal and visual clichés, subjecting them to irony and endeavouring to distinguish language from its customary, daily political connotations. He subjected twentieth century art to analytical treatment, particularly in the cycle *Eksploatacija mrtvih* (*Exploitation of the Dead*) 1984–90, assuming the role of exploiter, using the poetics of the Russian avant-garde, social realism and geometric abstraction of the 1950s, which he called dead because in his context they no longer conveyed meaning. Treating symbols in this way, the artist demonstrates the exploitation that is so frequent in ideology, religion and art. Aware of the brutality of the act, as he himself puts it, [he] 'launches a "debate" on the language of art and ideology, a "story" that unfolds in non-order, in a series of contradictory stories about death'. After the fall of communism, Stilinović broadened his research into language, expanding into the social aspects of different environments and their interrelations. He emphasizes the cynicism of power with his 'language games', substantiating his claims, as before, with humour and irony.

Like Vlado Martek, Stilinović was a member

of the Group of Six Authors that organised exhibition-actions on city streets between 1975 and 1981.

He works with the Slovenian group IRWIN in their *Retro-Avant-Garde* project.

Vlado Martek

(b. 1951 Zagreb. Lives and works in Zagreb.)

fig. 197

Vlado Martek believes a contemporary artist must take a stand with respect to the resources at his disposal. Given that he arrived in the sphere of visual art from poetry, he invested efforts to purify poetry of everything that was superfluous, and subjected it to his creative will. For this reason Martek's 'pre-poetry', as he terms one sphere of his work, is a re-examination and 'cleansing' of poetry to such an extent that he reduces it to examining the material quality of the elements he uses to achieve the physical feature of a poem: letters, alphabet, poetic forms, pad, pencil, etc. Martek also raises the level of awareness of a state of mind preparing to write poetry: 'Every act of picking up a pencil is an act of integrity' or 'Before I write a poem I must collect the garbage in my street' are just two in a series of slogans entitled *Pre-Valuation of Poetry*.

In the 1970s, Martek's poetry acquired specific forms; he extracted it from the book to various visual contexts: mirrors, objects consisting of books and poster poetry. Rebellious against the linear in a text, he added visual meanings to verbal ones and created poetry in situations and actions that he performed on the streets of various cities.

Martek is at the same time highly political, in an anarchic sense. He doesn't stop at art objects, he wants more: to change the outlook on life, to alter life with art actions, to attack the authorities, 'which only teach respect and faith', and to attack the state, 'which consistently supports a system of non-freedom'. His actions, graffiti and publications are full of ironic and very witty slogans attacking the authorities. He handed out cookies with 'Lie to the State' imprinted on them, and leaflets 'Artists, To Arms', he carried a hairy flag through the streets and sold money for half its value. The state should be attacked in all its manifestations of power, Martek pointed out, because the 'state is not a passive animal'. His sense of humour never diminishes his subversiveness.

Vlado Martek was a member of the Group of Six Authors, which was active in Zagreb between 1975 and 1981.

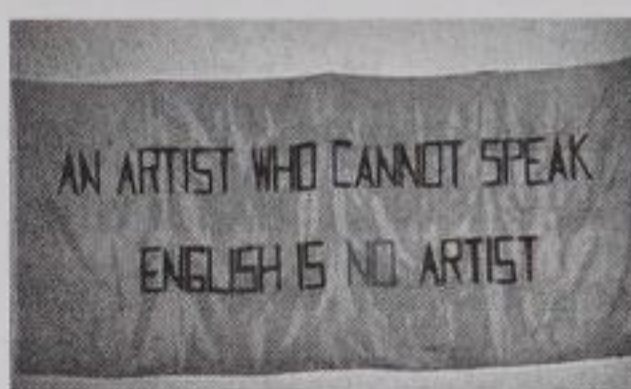
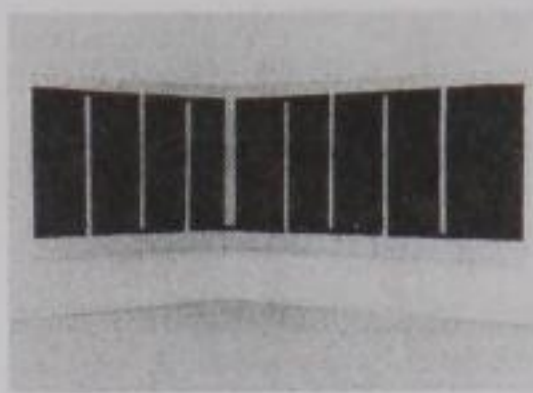
Goran Petercol

(b. 1949 Pula, Croatia. Lives and works in Zagreb.)

fig. 226

Since the mid 1980s Goran Petercol has been working with light and shadow, giving them concrete form in relation to different objects and spaces in which he exhibits his work. He uses slide-projectors and floodlights and frequently slides showing forms that he has recorded earlier by camera and which provide the basis of his present and future installations. Petercol's artworks are an event, a narration of construction. In order to read a work, the spectator must enter into a type of research, reconstructing layers, to understand the process of creating a work. Although the works are ascetic and ultimately non-materialistic, this aspect is present nevertheless. A feeling of fascination with the work is a consequence of both the visual sensation of space and the intellectual satisfaction of participating in detecting its cause and effect. Petercol's position has always been two-fold, and used to emphasise the relativism that is so close to him. His installations demand reading as an incentive to produce meaning that is neither clear nor constant. Many works by Petercol speak of levelling different types of discourse, pointing to the deconstruction of hierarchic thought. Petercol's desire to add phases of visual situations to one another is an attempt to base a system of references that act as *différance*, as a gyration, as the endless transfer of visual languages one to another by repetition within the potential of the given space. Petercol's art is confirmed as an effective strategy that brings into doubt all illusions of presentation.

In his installations within the *Serije kupaonica* (*Series of Bathrooms*) 2000, ceramic elements as well as shelves were illuminated by a projection of the form that the shadows of these objects took in a previously constructed situation. The shadows became islands of light above the objects casting similar forms. One gave rise to another, with a minimum of intervention, or rather, with relocation: the artist led the viewer through situations while absent himself. The works, organised as processes, respect an initial rigid logic, balancing the real and unreal, light and shadow, and blending the material and immaterial, producing subtle visual sensations. By using elements of bathroom fixtures in his installations, he briefly moved away from seriousness, since, in works that are subject to deconstructivist interpretations, the objects used rapidly assume a secondary importance. One should not overlook the fact that although the works are open to analysis and interpretation, they also represent themselves.



From left to right and top to bottom:

The Gorgona Group *Adoration* 1966

Gorgona Anti-Review, Josip Vaništa *Gorgona n° 6* 1961

Dimitrije Bašičević / Mangelos *Le manifeste sur la mort* before 1978

Julije Knifer *Meander in a Corner* 1961

Ivan Kožarić *Slicing off Sljeme* 1960

Tomislav Gotovac *Presenting the Elle Magazine* 1962

Goran Trbuljak *... Old and bald I search for ... a gallery* 1994

Mladen Stilinović *An artist who cannot speak English is no artist* 1994

Vlado Martek *USA-Balkans* 1996

Goran Petercol *Shelf* 2001

Mapping Czech Art

Jana and Jiří Ševčík

In his book *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Frederic Jameson assumes that so-called cognitive mapping can, as a means of political culture, comprehensively represent various languages, codes, their capacity and potential in today's global system. By that he means the renewal of 'cognitive and pedagogical dimensions of political art and culture', whose aesthetics can be the cognitive map. Marina Gržinić introduced Jameson in connection with her mapping of the retro-avant-garde in the former Yugoslavia and within this context her statements rank among the major contributions to the new cartography of Eastern Europe.

Kevin Lynch's 1960s study, *The Image of the City*, has become one of the models of cognitive mapping. Although it is bound too much to the phenomenology of space and its experience and lacks a political and historical dimension, it can be extrapolated for a different reality. We used Lynch's method in Czechoslovakia in the 1970s to analyse two cities or urban landscapes with a strong political and critical subtext: in the early 1970s, a historical medieval town of Most and a modern socialist city — a complex of newly-built housing estates on a modernist ground plan — existed next to each other in a unique constellation. Later, the historical town of Most was levelled to the ground to make way for brown coal mines. The comparison of mental maps of both types of city based on the analysis of spatial experience showed a loss of orientation in the housing estate complex, and therefore a loss of freedom and aesthetic satisfaction that people had in the historical site (in a way similar to Boston in Kevin Lynch's study).

The transfer of mental mapping into the field of social structure, or in our case into the 'landscape' of art and its ideological representation in Eastern

Europe, can be understood as a critical revision of the hitherto dominant cartography of art. It should create a new awareness of space, enable orientation and identification of positions within it, while giving its inhabitants freedom. Therefore it involves re-politicisation (actually, in Jameson's work cognitive mapping is considered to be class consciousness).

The contribution to the new cartography will probably consist of partial maps of countries or cultural circles, designed with a special regard for the local conditions and socio-political context. The question is whether it will be possible to create a real cognitive map with a plastic record of the entire structure of functions and values. Individual contributions can at least have the character of itineraries, navigational manuals or guides for routes that connect individual focal points, at the same time defining broader regions. This was the process by which we structured Lynchean images of cities (focal points, communicational nodes, critical regions, borders, solitary points, etc.).

A common problem that complicates the mapping of all post-socialist countries is the fact that along with the contribution to the new cartography of the art of Eastern Europe, everybody must re-map his or her own art with his or her local specifics. The existing representations have so far excluded entire natural complexes or moved within a simplified dialectic of the official and unofficial. However, a new map cannot be an objective representation, which is no longer a cognitive map, but a de-politicised list of individual elements, in which we will again lose our orientation. The attempt at cartography of East European art will also be affected by antinomies and a considerable asymmetry of the 'post-socialist world', be it turning points in history or a cultural orientation of individual countries.

Since the 1980s mental maps of Eastern Europe and the West have been laid upon each other and analogies sought for the blank spaces of the East European map. These spaces have a great cognitive and commercial potential. They can be included in a different cartography and bring a stronger aesthetic satisfaction because there are understandable analogies for them. Apart from that, they are an apt addition to the finished line, and have therefore become a goal for the Columbus-like expeditions and probes into the discoveries of Eastern Europe. Individual elements of the art scene have often been extracted since these could be appropriated into the accepted history of the West.

In the Czech lands the initial layout of the map (or the itinerary), which we are trying to create, is formed by several late avant-garde projects documented during World War II and immediately afterwards. One of them is Zdeněk Pešánek's publication *Kinetism*, which was written as early as the interwar period. This work had been evolving gradually since the period of Czech Poetism in the 1920s. This was the time of the debate about the self-reference of art and the transformation of a static work of art into a functional and energetic structure with a larger social effect thanks to its wider appeal (film, neon advertisements, programmed optical and kinetic objects in a public space). Pešánek's object on the roof of the Edison Transformation Station in Prague came to symbolise the new art of the moment. The text of *Kinetism* was one of the first covert defences of abstract art at a time when light kinetic forms were naturally consumed, according to Pešánek, by the broadest social strata.

The second avant-garde project published after the war was Karel Honzík's book *Tvorba životního slohu* (*Creation of a Lifestyle*), which combined the programme of a functional and structural understanding of architecture and reduced it to a 'direct action' — that is, an open intervention in a non-symbolic space directed at a new lifestyle.

The third and probably last avant-garde utopian text of post-war Czech culture is *Obytná krajina* (*Inhabitable Landscape*) by the architect Ladislav Žák (fig. 6) with a long introduction by Karel Teige. The dream of an inhabitable landscape of the future seemed to be realisable immediately after the war, when socialism seemed to be a real alternative social arrangement. The special interconnection of technical culture, nature and biological and economic liberation

in this project was perceived as a realisation of the surrealist revolutionary manifesto: a convergence of poetry, love and freedom. Le Corbusier's wisdom of architecture — Diogenes's barrel — had been reproduced in the post-war vision of new man, a socialist Diogenes. The new social system would liberate him from extra work and the fetishisation of objects. His character would be determined by the post-war programme of 'necessism' — i.e. breaking free from material consumption and unnecessary capitalist overproduction, which was to be replaced by the production of the most valuable intangible product — leisure time.

After the war, members of the avant-garde tried in vain to institutionalise their utopias in research and development institutions exploring light and kinetics, through reasonable consumption and lifestyle, and in laboratories of landscape development and folk culture. Their ideas were seized by the political powers, which realised them through traditional means, thus they became the institutionalised property of the political ideology. The interwar avant-garde at that time appeared on the official map as an already historical and outdated integral part of the newly construed genealogy of socialist realism, whose authority it was to confirm. Avant-garde artists were thus condemned to a change of function in their art, and were also forced to change their alliances.

The avant-garde tradition was maintained in another, non-classical medium, namely the poly-scenic theatre, which developed the pre-war Theatergraph of E. F. Burian, namely, a light theatre with film projection, renewed in the 1950s. The director Alfréd Radok and the stage designer Josef Svoboda experimented with a scenographic plan of the theatre, and in their *Magic Lantern* 1958 they managed to put together a collage of socialist film ready-mades (propagandistic political documentaries) with real actors on stage.

In the meantime the map of post-war art of the then Czechoslovakia was markedly co-determined by a new phenomenon. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the post-war generation of Eastern Europe produced a new *bohème*, which in several circles of non-conformist individuals formed a proto-beatnik underground society in Prague. It mixed Marxist philosophy, Trotskyism and the ideals of world revolution, a surrealist imagination, non-European philosophies and a concern for the reality of

political processes. One of the leading figures was the philosopher and poet **Egon Bondy** (fig. 9), who founded the samizdat edition *Půlnoc* (*Midnight*) and in 1950 wrote a collection of poems entitled programmatically *Totální Realismus* (*Total Realism*). The collection abandoned the surrealist aesthetic and psychological model of artistic expression and inclined towards the reality of the totalitarian Czechoslovak state, including its myths, which Bondy had adopted as his own reality. Bondy's total realism departed from metaphorical poetics, placing real facts of socialist life alongside images of Stalinist myths and detached descriptions of political processes just like intimate events without any interpretation. What remained of surrealism was the equation life = revolution = poetry, but in the post-war years of crisis and totalitarianism it was a poetry of negation, embarrassing poetry, de-poetised and de-aesthetised poetry. Bondy's *2000, Román* (*2000, Novel*), which alternates poetic texts and documentary entries from a diary with theoretic contemplations about art and radical political treatises, is constructed in a similar way:

Whatever tends towards the happiness of the human being is always subversive. Because it goes to the roots of our psycho-physical duality, to the impossibility of realising the daydreams ('Tagträumen') about our own body, not to mention the impossibility of realising them through physical love, much less in domestic social circumstances. Therefore, everything that tends towards constant ecstasy, rather than towards stagnation, is subversive and will clearly also be subversive in a classless society because as far as I know masturbation, that old rodent of our desire, did not disappear with the introduction of socialism.

The black, subversive values of the art of the bourgeois epoch, however, that is, the anti-bourgeois art, are not black for the century of fascism. Nietzsche was skilfully adapted as *usum delphini* in the Third Reich, surrealism in America and Lenin in Russia. And even that which is still rejected perhaps even more vehemently today, liberated sexuality, has lost that relevant and immediate impact, which it still had between the two wars. Today it is

impossible to call out to old Rhodus — *hic salta!* — because the Rhodus of fascism lies in other geographical latitudes. None of the instruments that we have inherited and that they have taught us to use, whether instruments of content, form or purpose, is applicable against fascism; or, to put it another way, they are about as useless against fascism as the wooden lances of the Abyssinians were against the Italian tanks. Today, these useless instruments are thrown away for the same psychological reasons as in the case of the Abyssinians — so that one can flee more quickly.

Art has achieved so much in the past fifty years! And most of these results end up on the scrap heap.

Initially the aesthetics of total realism was known within a narrow circle of the new avant-garde or *bohème*, and soon got into conflict with the pre-war avant-garde as well as the official culture. The beat culture of this generation of Czech artists stemmed from the fact that they belonged neither to the past nor to the future regimes. The underground existence and samizdat editions strongly influenced the beat movement after 1968, when this tradition became topical. Egon Bondy contributed to the radicalisation of the underground, to its distancing itself not only from the official, but also the unofficial alternative culture. His poems of total realism were attempts to create a second culture put to music by rock groups in the 1970s (Egon Bondy's *Happy Hearts Club Banned*, *Plastic People of the Universe*).

The cognitive map of Czech art includes another personality from a literary background, the poet **Jiří Kolář** (fig. 32). With reference to Lévi-Strauss, Kolář accused all literature of paying lip service to repressive power; according to him, new art was to reveal the knots of this enslavement and deconstruct them. As a new element of communication Kolář offered 'evident poetry', which excluded the written word and liberated itself from language and the possibility of its being abused by power. Kolář looked for a second form of new art as early as the 1950s in his 'destatic poetry' based on instructions for actions. This anticipated the short scripts of performance and action art of a later date. The non-static and evident poetry functioned on the basis of the aleatoric principle, which adopts a certain limited structure capable of absorbing anything

and filling up with accidental images according to established rules. Kolář counted on the fact that anyone could realise the unpredictability of accident, while learning how immensely real it actually was. Kolář had played the role of a great catalyst for art in the 1950s and 1960s, and his position on the map is crucial, touching all aspects of the art of the period: total realism as well as the poly-scenic character of theatre projections, where images penetrate each other in various perspectives (similar to Kolář's autonomous texts of other authors, which penetrate each other and even seem to be taking responsibility for themselves in their accidental encounter).

The position of **Milan Knížák** (fig. 28) on the map of Czech art is closely related to that of the early underground and non-static poetics, namely, instructions to be carried out. Knížák and his group Actual Art, later called Aktual, played an important therapeutic role in Czech art. Today we see it, above all, as an opposition to the broad post-surrealist front, determining the mainstream aesthetic norm. The whole activity shifted to concept, non-static genres: a lecture, a demonstration, games and festivals; their main function being to educate about disrupting everyday reality: 'It is the art of teaching man how to live.'

It can be viewed as a kind of primary education, hygiene, expression of anonymous messianism. And at the same time this activity is nothing extraordinary. Only a simple complementation of the missing. Prescribing missing vitamins. Using every action for a demonstration, an attack on one's environment and oneself. Using means with the most direct intensity of impact. Making from many everyday situations in life a game, thus ridding them of being cramped and monstrous. Making an impression by every gesture, word, act, view, appearance, EVERYTHING. A simple anonymous activity. There is no difference between an action called out on purpose and a spontaneous one. Spontaneous street rituals. Conflicts. Conflicts of all kind. Conflicts which have to come into being in order to be solved. It is irrelevant what means are used, but always only those which are the most maximal at the moment. Christ, Karl Marx or a member of the police might be co-creators...

Playing in the 1960s, Knížák's rock band Aktual significantly influenced the underground scene of the 1970s, but his other artistic activities remained virtually unknown in the Czech Republic; he was not able to organise his first exhibitions until twenty years later in the late 1980s. In the meantime his name had, for a long time, been included on the cognitive map of Fluxus, compiled by George Maciunas.

The complementary Other on the Czech map of post-war culture was the broad stream of post-surrealist art, whose key notion was the Breton-like inner model, defined and modified in the Czech context by Karel Teige. It had served as a notion of strategic importance in the struggle for modern culture, explaining the method and process of creative work and becoming a key concept in the genealogy of modern art, which progressed irreversibly from the imitation of the inner psychological model to the irrealism. Yet, in the 1940s, it still remained the only principle that the avant-garde refused to abandon, even though it was willing to make compromises in its political views. The inner model also secured for the avant-garde the basis of its creative work that lay outside of aesthetics, thus liberating the reality of unconscious sources. However, the proximity of the totalitarian regime and the experience of the war that was still resonant led to its redefinition. The existential event and its trace in the matter of the work became the only authentic reality at that time. The existential character of the feelings of man engaged in conflict with the period and injured by the regime suited the political interpretation and art of 'structural abstraction' very well. This post-surrealist tendency developed into a variation of Informel which was soon declared to be a specifically local (national) expression and a historically determined invariant.

At this time the inner model was reactivated and so-called 'Imaginative Art' was declared as the most resistant and the most singularly local and historically determined art form. The revival of the inner model was in fact an anti-utopian project and in the 1950s, the reaction to avant-garde projects had been subjected to the power of manipulation by the totalitarian regime. Under these circumstances, a future attitude to East European artists as victims was formed, and simultaneously the excuse of the East European artist and his biographical story was construed for the West. The ideology and aesthetics of transcendence, moral responsibility and exposure to violence created a complex of illusions about the

special privileges of life in an abnormal situation. The consequences of this ideology can be traced to the present day even in the works of artists who did not succumb to this complex: in their works there is a non-conceptualised, traumatic surplus; perhaps East European art as a whole is a leftover.

The contradiction between such vastly different aesthetic practices as the approach focussing on existential experience and the approach promoting an 'objective' attitude, which preferred a method and a concept over an aesthetic product, determined the dynamics of the unofficial culture for the whole period. As early as the beginning of the 1960s, artists from the group Crossroads (Křižovatka), which included, among others, **Zdeněk Sýkora** (fig. 124), Karel Malich and Jiří Kolář, had made an iconoclastic breakthrough. They rejected the narrative character of existential stories and based their work on an aleatory contract counting on chance and the use of processes lying outside of aesthetics such as a programme, calculation or instruction. The link between avant-garde, contemporary constructivist art and post-painterly abstraction is mainly represented by Zdeněk Sýkora. His anti-romanticist stance and collaboration with computer programmers have led him to a consistent development of the combinatory principle.

Although **Karel Malich** (fig. 57) belongs to the neo-constructivist and neo-avant-garde movement of the 1960s in the Czech lands, his specific position is carefully defined, as a prototype of an intuitive energetic sensibility, envisaged by Kasimir Malevich. In Malich's early period, he designed and executed in model form utopian structures of cities (buildings for non-police states, thermic structures, underground cities) with the construction of energy flows as an answer to the 'apocalyptic narrative character' of mainstream art. He rejected an anthropological approach to art and constructed sculptures using wires, whose intersections form energy nodes expanding into the impersonal universe and its non-apocalyptic emptiness. In the closeness of the 1970s, Malich experienced a crisis of social isolation. In it, his hyper-sensibility concerning the energy of inner processes, whose turbulence, roar and disgorging he recorded, increased. This was his way of surviving the crisis of the 1970s and 1980s.

A figure from a younger generation who connects the 1970s with the postmodernist 1980s is **Jiří Kovanda** (fig. 96). He was only recently discovered by Western art history, which is mainly due to his

minimalist events which could sometimes hardly be distinguished from real situations and which appear as pure protocols of record-making, unburdened by any symbolism and rhetoric. In fact small gestures of his action-performances had a therapeutic character: almost always they represented a state of waiting for a moment of personal interaction or functioned as a challenge for normal communication; in that they had a rather subtle and sublimated social dimension. Typical of his work was the later metamorphosis of actions and spatial interventions into objects which had a dual code: they were found material (often recycled art packaging) characterised by their previous use, and referring to highbrow art. Compared with Kovanda's works, which were ironic commentaries on minimalist and conceptual projects, the domestic Czech art scene seemed rather ephemeral.

The 1970s saw the end of hopes for a more universal model of culture, and artists were once again confronted with the choice between the mind and the conscience. At this time all artistic programmes were concerned with defence, resistance and passivity; the aesthetics of 'total distancing' and transcendence spread beyond the field of highbrow art. The only cultural elements of resistance in the thus extended field were numerous underground bands. In this community various archaic and magic contexts, as well as an ideology of returns, were realised, these being the only escape during the period of total isolation. The so-called 'second culture' and the underground undoubtedly offered salvation for people in search of a different way of life. The 'second culture' was influenced by the underground action art of the 1950s, as well as the Baroque character of the Czech Informel, mystical texts and psychedelic music. Its ideology was co-created primarily by Egon Bondy and **Ivan M. Jirous** (fig. 97). This ideology, full of contradictions, turned the movement into a myth, making it élitist. It did not openly assume any political stances, but saw its function primarily as creating a culture designed to change society, i.e. a culture as a tool of the existential revolution:

I've used the word 'underground' here a number of times and twice the term 'second culture'. In conclusion, I'd like to clarify what this is. The underground is not bound to a specific artistic movement or style, although in music, for example, it is mainly associated with rock. The underground is the

stance of intellectuals and artists who consciously assume a critical position with regard to the world in which they live. It is a declaration of a struggle against the establishment, the established system. It is a movement that mainly employs artistic means, but its representatives realise that art is not and should not be the final goal of the artists' efforts. The underground is made up of people who understand that nothing can be changed through legal means and who do not even try to become legal. Ed Sanders of the New York band The Fugs put it clearly when he declared 'a total assault on culture'. This assault can only be made by people who stand outside of culture. In brief, the underground is the activity of artists and intellectuals whose work is unacceptable to the establishment; they do not respond passively to this unacceptability, but try to destroy the establishment with their work and their stance. Madness and humility are the necessary characteristics of those who have chosen the underground for their work and for their idle time. Those who lack these qualities won't last long in the underground.

The aim of the underground in the West is the direct destruction of the establishment. The aim of the underground in our country is the creation of a second culture — a culture which will be totally independent of the official communication channels and social recognition as well as of the hierarchy of values powered by establishment: a culture whose goal is not to destroy the establishment because to do so would be to run into the arms of the captor. Instead, a culture that frees those who want to join it of scepticism that there's no way to do anything and shows them that there's plenty to do if those who do it want little for themselves and more for others. This is the only way of living out life's remaining years that await all those who agree with the words of Hussite chiliast Martin Húska: 'A loyal person is worth more than any sacrament.'

The programmes and models of this non-political practice continued to render the situation of the 1970s and 1980s more existential. Václav Havel called it the

post-totalitarian age because according to him life in this system caught between the dictatorship of political bureaucracy and consumer society was only a 'grotesquely heightened image of modern life in general' (are we not, in fact, only a sort of 'memento to the West, uncovering its latent direction?'). Havel assumed that the starting point for a more profound metamorphosis, a moral and existential revolution and source of all social movements was the pre-political area where 'life in truth' was confronted with 'life in a lie'. Therefore the post-democratic and post-socialist system of the new society was to evolve in the specific environment of our post-totalitarianism and it was to accept the structure of dissident groups or alternative associations and their 'non-political politics'.

The alternative culture had preserved the notion of art as an eschatological project, and therefore theories of postmodernism were perceived as provoking a disintegration of values. In the Czech lands postmodernism was at first introduced through architecture and was mediated by translations of Jencks and Venturi published by samizdat. At this time philosophical discourse in our country was mostly associated with phenomenology and Heidegger's understanding of art. Apart from that, an important role was also played by research into the image of regional cities devastated by industry. These studies described substitute reference systems created by inhabitants in the environment of housing estates, but the purpose of the whole analysis as well as the ideological construct of mental maps was too narrowly linked with the phenomenological concept of place. An important role in our formulation of the postmodernist model was played by the differentiation between eclecticism and historicism. Radical eclecticism appeared as a possibility for bridging the contradiction between the traditional and a utopian and political vision of the avant-garde. Radical eclecticism criticised the utopian, while realistically accepting the impure, irremovable and conflicting reality. The idea that it was possible to work with antagonisms and values that would not cancel each other out, and even opt for a ground zero situation, a sort of 'faded look', thereby getting rid of individual ambitions and challenging the subject as a guarantee of authenticity appeared morally questionable in the domestic setting. In spite of this, in the 1980s several painters made an attempt to continue the play of interpretations which were

construed anew and offered alternatives to how to change the then key importance of image or text. A statement by Jiří David (fig. 135) entitled, *Total Distance in the Period of Social Paleness* 1988 was important because it unknowingly used structural formulation: namely that contact with the situation takes place exclusively through language which, apart from other things, means that its meanings are construed anew.

If the period of social paleness needs to be precisely defined and characterised, the new meanings of the general terms must be delimited. Seeing that any contact with the situation is made manifest exclusively in the field of language (language = a multi-layered model of an idea about reality), there is no other way than that, which understands the meaning of TOTAL DISTANCE in its full, undistorted sense... The greatest contribution and significance of total distance consists in the removal of all possible poles; thus getting to the state of a ZERO SITUATION. This is a validity extended in a general sense and, if we concentrate on the area of art, such a situation is not accompanied by a presumed apathy, a levelling-out, alienation, nihilism or scepticism, or by a state of balance, calm, resignation or conciliation, but by a period of so-called PALENESS. This period entails various stages. One of these is called the period of SOCIAL PALENESS... It is a stage in which the main feature is the disappearance of all possible layers of evaluation; it has no personal or collective programmes, no hierarchy, symbolic language, allegories; it does not dictate anything, does not explain anything and therefore has no layers of psychologising! Personal input only moves about in the area of awareness of this relationship – the form of execution is only a matter of professional routine. Any individual ambition is thus worthless, and only the distance from the created artefact (the self-reflection of language) is corrected.

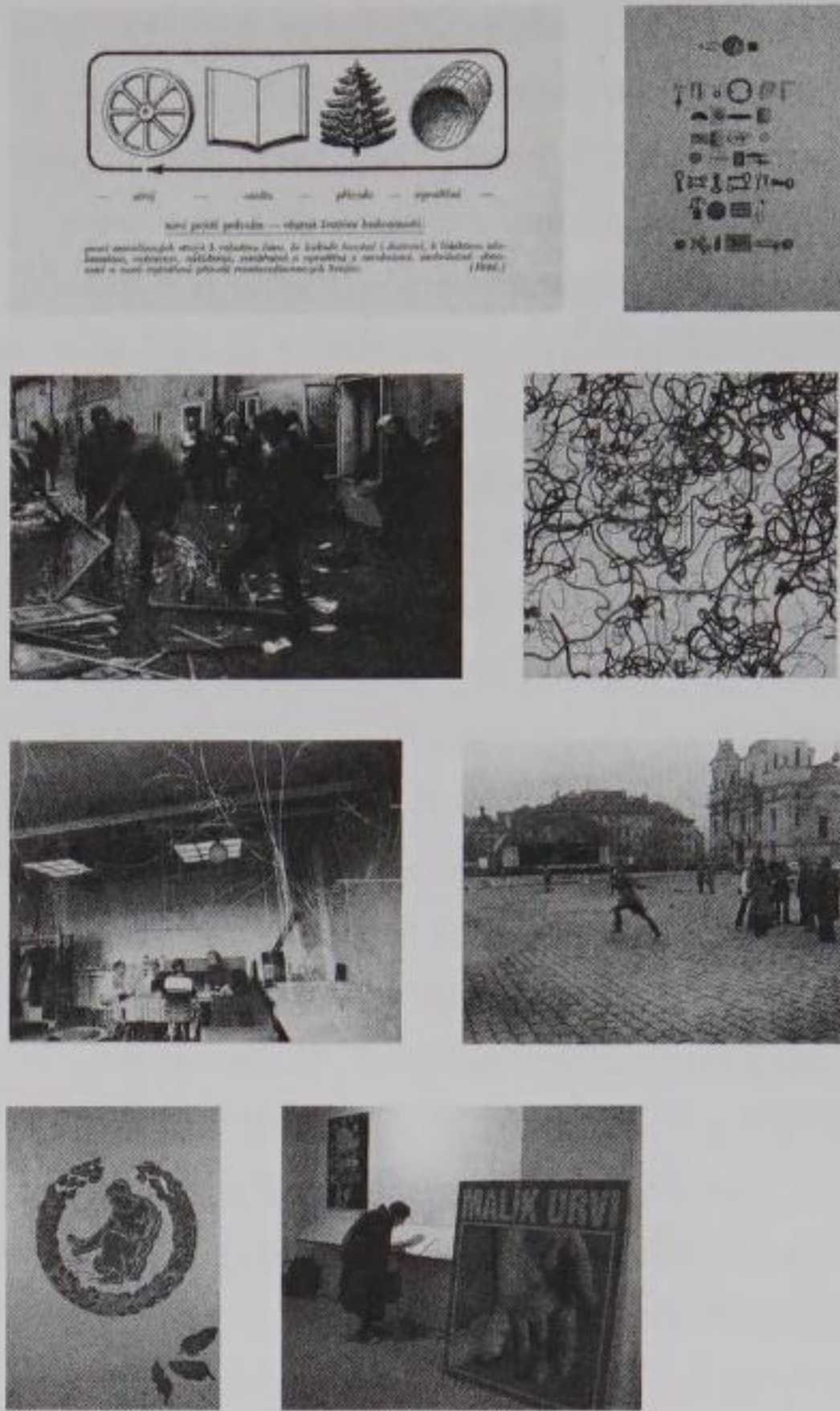
The present post-socialist situation has also been affected by the old 'leftover problems' of the past, one of them being the mechanism of resistance to power and ideology. In its defence against the regime, art

has been fossilised in the traditional values of artistic autonomy. One of the extreme reactions to the old intrusions into art, justified on political grounds, is the de-politicising of art and the weakening of its social function, which forms part of new conservative attitudes in culture. In the Czech milieu, the re-politicisation of art and the radicalisation of political thought could create a counter-balance to the post-political politics (non-political politics), which has shifted into the space outside ideological disputes and which tries to prevent partial or minority requests from being presented as universal requests (Slavoj Žižek).

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the Czech art scene has been politicised by two groups, **Pode Bal** (fig. 220) and Rafani. The artistic community has accepted them with great reservation because they have broken the taboo of de-politicisation and have seized the space in which they organise their exhibitions in a totalitarian manner, extending it to the sphere of the whole mass media and creating crises by means of their ambiguous projects. At the same time, they have stuck to Czech themes, including: the link between the new ruling élite and collaborators of the former secret police, the forced departure of Sudeten Germans from Czechoslovakia in the aftermath of World War II, over-identification with members of the extreme left or right movements, anti-drug legislation, as well as criticism of the institution of the National Gallery, which both groups, independently of each other, carried out in the form of action-situations.

The artistic practices of both groups have revived the cognitive and therapeutic functions of art at a time when the de-politicised or anti-political cultural society is losing its awareness of the fact that there are broader issues, that solidarity is possible and that it makes sense to strive for a change of the system. The radicalisation and politicisation of aesthetics should result in an iconoclastic gesture *vis-à-vis* the ideology of total distancing and transcendence, which at least in the Czech lands has led to art becoming more like a religion and turning the attention away from the medium itself. The iconoclasm halts the unstoppable march of images and decreases postmodernist hedonism or, as the case may be, it replaces it with a reference to a different and more universal framework where more ascetic and ephemeral products will assert themselves. Incidentally, the West accepts this attitude because

it enables it to incorporate some of the East European projects into its own history, placing them in its market as well as the archive/museum. In our situation, this gesture is a sort of a retro-reference to the avant-garde, which would work on the once again topical issue of the relationship between the political in art and the freedom of art. The cognitive map of Czech art after World War II can be imagined, according to the briefly presented itinerary, as a spatial constellation of simultaneously working forces and their vectors, as well as a historical structure that will have to be continuously supplemented and regrouped, similar to the overall map of Eastern Europe.



From left to right and top to bottom:

- Ladislav Žák *Avant-Garde Ideogram of the Residential Landscape of the Future* 1947
- Jiří Kolář *Black Sugar* 1963
- Milan Knížák *The Second Manifestation of Actual Art* with Vít Mach, Soňa Švecová and Jan Trtílek 1965
- Zdeněk Sýkora *Line n° 24 / Last Judgement* 1983–4
- Karel Malich *Karel Malich in the Living Room of his Flat/Studio* circa 1970
- Jiří Kovanda *23rd January 1978 I had a date with several of my friends...* 1978
- Jiří David *Crown* 1988
- Pode Bal *Malík Urvi* 2000

Between the Extremes of Figuration/Realism and Abstraction

Inke Arns

Willi Sitte

(b. 1921 Chrastava, Czechoslovakia)

fig. 17

Willi Sitte, a painter and a graphic artist, began to study art in 1936 at the North Bohemian Industrial Museum School in Liberec, and later at the Hermann Göring Meisterschule in Kronenberg (Eifel). He was expelled in 1941 when he co-authored a letter protesting the school's training methods, and was then drafted into military service. While posted in Italy in 1944–5, Sitte joined a group of Italian partisans. In 1946, he returned to his native town and worked there for a German anti-fascist group. Already active in the communist youth movement from the 1930s, he soon (in 1947) moved to what was then the Soviet-occupied zone of Germany. Sitte's artistic work and his lifestyle were closely bound up with political and cultural developments in the German Democratic Republic, where he would become a highly influential figure among artists and critics.

As a painter, Sitte was influenced by early Italian artists, as well as Léger and Picasso and the Mexican muralist David Siqueiros. He initially painted decorative and lyrical compositions, but in the 1950s his paintings took on a pictorial quality, depicting biblical, mythological and socialist philosophical themes. Later this developed into expressionism, especially in his nude paintings, which drew heavily from Lovis Corinth. In 1962 Willi Sitte was officially accused of revisionism and criticised because of his stylistic and cultural political wilfulness, which opposed the doctrine of socialist realism (see, for example, his painting *Rufende Frauen* (*Calling Women*) 1957). After a public self-critique ('I realise that I did not advocate my Party's positions in their entirety... I absolutely confess to the resolutions of my Party, because only from a partial viewpoint is it possible to discuss

unresolved problems, but always in the sense of strengthening the art in the GDR'), Sitte started his party career in 1964 in the Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (SED — Socialist Unity Party of Germany). In the 1960s, Sitte began to concentrate on the Marxist themes of class struggle and anti-imperialism. He advocated the principles of socialist realism but was influenced by Italian 'realismo'. He held a chair at the training institute Hochschule für Industrielle Formgestaltung, and was eventually elected president, in 1974, of the union for artists and craftsmen, the Verband Bildender Künstler der DDR. In this position, which he held until 1988, Sitte had responsibility for maintaining the artistic principles of the party. Sitte supported the SED through the 1980s (from 1986–9 he was a member of the central committee of the SED). Even after he lost his post at the Verband, he was considered an honorary president by a hard-line group within the union. Through the 1990s, Sitte continued to paint human figures in a bold, realistic style, which reflected the eclectic origins of his technique.

Gerhard Altenbourg

(b. 1926 Rödichen-Schnepfenthal — d. 1989)

fig. 75

Gerhard Altenbourg, German painter, printmaker and sculptor, born as Gerhard Ströch in Rödichen-Schnepfenthal near Gotha in the German state of Thuringia, made an early acquaintance with the power and the limits of the regime of the German Democratic Republic during his student days at the Hochschule für Baukunst und Bildende Kunst (University of Architecture and Fine Arts) in Weimar. From the start his interest was directed towards modernism, especially its literary aspects, which

inspired him to produce lyrical works of his own. Even in his first drawings, for example *Ecce Homo I* 1949, in which he addressed the painful experience of war, he achieved a marked individual style. He was obliged to break off his studies in 1950 because the 'amorality of his motifs' was met with criticism. His determined preoccupation with modern art and the vocabulary of form set him at odds with prevailing artistic ideology until late in his life. Despite constantly recurring political restrictions, the growing effect of his work within the cultural life of the GDR as well as in West Germany could not be stopped.

Altenbourg was preoccupied by three main motifs: portraits in which the physiognomical and the landscape permeate one another, landscapes that are closely related to his *Heimat* Thuringia, and scenic depictions of figures focussing on the mutual relation between human communication and isolation. In the 1940s and 1950s, although his plants and figures were depicted objectively, he produced tight-woven but reduced abstract shapes that anticipated the meticulously applied successive layers of non-objectivism. His work was always closely influenced by the area in which he was born and lived, particularly his landscapes, for example *Garden at the Spinnbahn* 1951. The large-format work *These Artists* 1957 demonstrates the abstract developing from his previously figurative style. Examples of his later work are *Over to Byzantium* 1971–2 and the *Splendour of the Abyss* 1981.

The work of Gerhard Altenbourg, who in 1955 adopted Altenburg, the name of his home town as a pseudonym, is to a particularly great extent the expression of a search for individuality. His works come from a world of forms both representative and abstract, related to Paul Klee and Wols, to surrealism and art brut. Already at the end of the 1950s Altenbourg was well received in West Germany and internationally: he participated in *Documenta II* in 1959 and in 1969 was the first artist from the GDR to become a member of the Academy of Arts in West Berlin. In the GDR however, Altenbourg's works were not shown until 1983.

Werner Tübke

(b. 1929 Schönebeck/Elbe)

fig. 140

Werner Tübke is a German painter and graphic artist and, together with Bernhard Heisig, one of the

important state artists in the GDR (the so-called Leipzig School). From 1945–7 he studied at the Master School for German Handicrafts in Magdeburg, from 1948–50 he continued his studies at the Academy for Graphics and Book Art (HGB) in Leipzig, where he was one of the first students after World War II, and from 1950–3 he studied art education and psychology at the University of Greifswald. Shortly after Stalin's death in 1953, Tübke in 1955 began teaching at the Leipzig Academy for Graphics and Book Art (HGB) as an assistant. In 1964 he became a lecturer at the HGB, and in 1972 he became a professor. Between 1973 and 1976 he was the rector of the HGB.

Since its re-opening after the war, officials at this art school dreamt of developing a new style of realist painting, a new German Realism. One of the very few officially accepted examples was the work of the Soviet socialist-realist painter Gerassimov. The development of a new realism was connected to a continuous fight against 'formalism' and against the 'degeneration' of modern, especially expressionist avant-garde art ('lebensferne, pessimistische Machwerke' ['distanced, pessimist concoctions'] as one contemporary TV commentary put it). At the Leipzig art school, which became something like the 'grail of socialist realism' (Dammbeck) in the 1960s, the painters clearly favoured a new kind of figurative art against abstraction, and fervently declared that they were 'not oriented towards modern art' (Kurella), and that they even fundamentally 'rejected modernism' (Tübke). In order to develop a new socialist art and following the official slogan 'NATIONAL IN FORM, SOCIALIST IN CONTENT', the painters of the Leipzig School turned to the classical German tradition leading back to Albrecht Dürer.

Tübke belongs to the most prominent and thus highly controversial artists from the former GDR. His main works are large-format paintings and panoramas, for example, about the social utopia of balancing opposites in *Arbeiterklasse und Intelligenz* (*Working Class and Intelligentsia*) 1970–3, the vision of the final triumph of humanism in *Der Mensch — Maß aller Dinge* (*Man — Measure of all Things*) 1975, and of course his monumental history painting in Bad Frankenhausen, *Frühbürgerliche Revolution in Deutschland* (*The Early Civil Revolution in Germany*, 123 × 14 m, 1976–88). This depicts several scenes from the revolutionary era of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and is a universal history panorama about the transition from the Middle Ages to modern times.

At the same time it is a pandemonium and a complex mirror of human passions in the dawning of a new century. In terms of style, Tübke uses an eclectic approach allowing him to establish a connection between past and present by linking and mixing painting styles from old Dutch, surrealist and expressionist traditions.

Bernhard Heisig

(b. 1925 Wrocław, Poland)

fig. 99

Bernhard Heisig is a German painter, printmaker and teacher. He attended the Kunstgewerbeschule in Breslau (1941–2). After his military service in the Waffen SS, completed in 1945, he worked as a graphic artist in the office of information and propaganda in Wrocław until 1947. Heisig studied at the Kunstgewerbeschule in Leipzig (1948–9) and at the Akademie für Graphische Künste in Leipzig (1949–51). In his early years he was indebted to the nineteenth-century realists such as Gustave Courbet, Ilya Repin, Adolph Menzel and Wilhelm Leibl, but he looked increasingly to the art of twentieth century German painters, for example Lovis Corinth, Oskar Kokoschka and Max Beckmann. Early in his career Heisig showed his commitment to socially concerned painting that dealt with contemporary problems. In content his paintings are influenced by portrait studies (*Bildnis Vaclav Neumann* 1973) and historical themes (on the subjects of socialism and the workers' movement), as in *Pariser Commune* 1960–5, as well as Prussian and German history (*Beharrlichkeit des Vergessens* 1977). Heisig has looked for pictorial means to express these concerns in large-scale history paintings. Where the message made it appropriate he often used the triptych as a form. He quoted historical subjects as parables.

Together with Wolfgang Mattheuer, Werner Tübke and Willi Sitte he was the most prominent representative of socialist realist painting in the former GDR. In the 1960s he occasionally found himself in contradiction to the state, but later, in the 1970s, he was officially recognised. In 1961 he became a professor at the HGB in Leipzig and at the same time its rector. While he was dismissed as the HGB's rector in 1964 because of the SED's restrictive cultural politics, he remained professor at the art school until 1968. In 1968 he gave up his professorship because of growing political pressure. In 1972 he became a

member of the German Academy of Arts, Berlin, received important awards and in 1973 his first comprehensive exhibitions took place in Dresden and Leipzig. From 1976–87 he was again elected as rector at the Leipzig art school.

From the mid-1970s Heisig and his realist colleagues were increasingly recognised in West Germany — a slap in the face for non-conformist artists in the GDR. Heisig and others participated in *Documenta VI* (1977). In 1983–4 Heisig painted a portrait of the then-West German chancellor, Helmut Schmidt. When in 1998 an official jury decided that Heisig would be among the artists who would be commissioned to produce a work for the new Bundestag in Berlin, a wave of controversy and public discussion erupted (as part of the ongoing dispute about 'Auftragskunst', or 'commissioned/state art', in the GDR since the mid-1990s). Christoph Tannert wrote: 'Heisig's didactic history painting of the "duty-doer-culprit" stands for stagnation and a lack of vision. Whoever paints and exhibits paintings of this kind suggests political stability to those who are afraid of change.'

Wolfgang Mattheuer

(b. 1927 Reichenbach)

fig. 126

Wolfgang Mattheuer is a painter, graphic artist and sculptor who, after a stonecutter's apprenticeship (1942–4), and his military service (he was a prisoner of war of the Red Army 1944–5), studied at the School of Applied Arts in Leipzig and from 1947–51 at the Academy for Graphic and Book Art (HGB) in Leipzig. In 1951–2 he worked as a graphic designer for the *Illustrierte Rundschau* in Berlin. In 1953 he returned to the HGB where he first taught as an assistant, from 1956 as a lecturer (in 1958 he became member of the SED), and, finally, since 1965 as a professor. In 1974 he gave up his teaching position at the HGB and since then has worked as independent artist in Leipzig and Reichenbach.

Wolfgang Mattheuer is one of the best known representatives of a critical realism in the former GDR. Together with Bernhard Heisig and Werner Tübke he was the leading representative of the Leipzig School of painting in the GDR. From 1958–88 he was a member of the SED. However, his individual choice of subject matter precluded him from being a propaganda artist for the GDR. His painting style

combines elements of *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity), and of expressionism, with surrealist inclinations. The themes of his paintings — very often allegorical and mythological enigmas using classical motifs like Icarus, Sisyphus and Janus — developed out of a subjective, critical reflection of the situation of the human being in a socialist society. Landscapes are a recurring motif, for example, in his well-known painting *Hinter den Sieben Bergen* (*Behind the Seven Hills*) 1973. He received several official prizes, e.g. in 1974 the National Prize 2nd Class of the GDR. In the 1980s Mattheuer's themes were increasingly influenced by a growing disillusionment about the failure of 'real existing socialism' in the GDR. New Objectivity was supplanted by the symbolic. Increasingly working in the style of magic realism, his works critically depicted what was contemporary, problematic, and essential in the GDR, and he operated on the knife's edge between tolerated and unacceptable criticism.

In June 1985 Mattheuer's sculpture *Der Jahrhundertstritt* (*The Step of the Century*) 1984–5 was included in the 11th *Bezirkskunstaussstellung* in the Museum of Fine Arts in Leipzig, where it soon became the sensational main focus. By combining the Hitler greeting of the right hand and the clenched Communist Rotfront fist of the left hand the sculpture depicts the twentieth century's clash between fascism and socialism, both imprisoned in the same body. The sculpture is a metaphor for the contradictions of twentieth century German history.

A.R. Penck (Ralf Winkler)

(b. 1939 Dresden)

fig. 83

A.R. Penck (Ralf Winkler) is a painter, graphic artist and sculptor. He is a self-taught artist because his applications to the art academies in Dresden and East Berlin were turned down. During his apprenticeship as a designer of adverts he took part in private evening painting classes taught by the artist Strawalde. Jürgen Böttcher-Strawalde had founded a group of non-conformist painters in Dresden, and, as a film maker and performer, had overcome the traditional limitations of the art genres. Besides lyrical works and cybernetic studies Penck actively participated as a musician in free jazz concerts in Dresden. In the 1960s he shared ideas with the neo-expressionist Baselitz. In 1968 Ralf Winkler assumed the name of the geologist and scholar of the Ice-Age Albrecht Penck

(b. 1858 — d. 1945), calling himself A.R. Penck from then on. His various pseudonyms are more than a name-confusion-game. In addition to his persona as a painter and sculptor, Penck is a talented jazz drummer using the names Mike Hammer, Alfa Omega and v. In 1980 he left the GDR and moved to West Germany.

In the late 1960s he developed a hieroglyphic style in a series of paintings called *Standart* in which a black stick figure represents everyman. The overall hieroglyphic mixture of stick figures, symbols, numbers, letters and patterns allude to a mythic subconscious, but are also related to Klee, Miró and other primitivist modern artists, e.g. *Der Jäger* 1985. Reminiscent of prehistoric signs, Penck's painting style described the human situation at the end of the twentieth century in an extremely reduced way. With large brush strokes he varied a standard vocabulary of archetypal characters in order to depict continuity of human anguish. While the *Weltbilder* (*World Images*) 1962 onwards, and the *Standartbilder* (*Standard Images*) 1968 onwards show a diagram-like schematic approach, Penck broadened his spectrum in the 1970s and 1980s by using accented colour planes and large-scale painting formats that are filled with complex imagery. Sculptures made from wood and bronze transfer the repertoire of symbols into the three-dimensional space.

Autoperforationsartisten / Auto-Perforation Artists

(est. 1985 Dresden)

fig. 137

The Autoperforationsartisten group was founded at the Academy of Fine Arts in Dresden (GDR) by Micha Brendel (b. 1959), Else Gabriel (b. 1962), Volker Via Lewandowsky (b. 1963) and Rainer Görß (b. 1960), who were at that time students of the Art Academy's stage design department. The group's name Autoperforationsartisten was first used in 1987 on the occasion of their diploma work *Herz Horn Haut Schrein* (*Heart Horn Skin Shrine*), a group performance held in the basement of the Art Academy. Autoperforationsartisten were the only artists in the GDR dealing with performance or body art. According to Durs Grünbein their work was about 'intermingling Fluxus, consensual theatrical acting, group concerts, scenic recitals and applied art, action art, in a more random manner resembling that of Neo-Dada, body art, open theatre or living installation'. Their favourite materials used during

these intuitive sado-masochistic trips were meat, blood, dough sculptures, vegetables, home-made props, costumes, masks and all kinds of orthopaedic bandages and instruments serving to inflict physical self-discipline. Taking performance as nothing less than a therapeutic event, the 'Protestant rituals' of the Autoperforationsartisten reflected the masochistic culture of authoritarian obedience and Protestant discipline in the GDR. In contrast to their often-quoted affinity with the activities of the Viennese actionists, the similarities are only superficial.

Concurrently with the first Joseph Beuys exhibition in the GDR in 1988, some members of the Autoperforationsartisten locked themselves into the Gallery Eigen + Art in Leipzig for eleven days (27 March–7 April 1988) and carried out an action entitled *Allez! Arrest!* They were not concerned with making a symbolic gesture for an invited audience of gallery visitors (who were permitted entry for two hours daily in order to exchange food for art), but with 'relentlessly incorporating one's own persona' (O. Nicolai). During the confinement, concerts were given by *Die Strafe (The Punishment)*. *Allez! Arrest!* was a reaction to the official reception of Beuys in the GDR: critical of the sudden official appraisal after a decade-long massive resistance to this artist (he was never permitted to enter the GDR), the Autoperforationsartisten at the same time rendered homage to Beuys, who had died in 1986. One can find various allusions to him in their work, e.g. in the performance *Beuys Beine machen (To make Beuys find his legs)* by Brendel, Gabriel and Görß 1987.

The Autoperforationsartisten broke up in 1991 as a result of an increase in the artists' individual work as well as decreasing pressure from the country's political system. The artists continue to make their own work.

Via Lewandowsky

(b. 1963 Dresden)

fig. 136

Via (Volker) Lewandowsky is a German artist whose works — performances, drawings, objects, installations — are loaded with bitter irony, suffering and a feeling of helplessness. Lewandowsky studied stage design at the Dresden Academy of Arts, where he met Micha Brendel, Else Gabriel and Rainer Görß, with whom he founded the Autoperforationsartisten group in 1987. The Auto-perforation Artists used their

performances and shock-action strategies to rattle the superficial culture of the communist state. In the 1980s, instead of socialist realism, the hollow propaganda art that had been declared the norm in East Germany, Lewandowsky introduced 'reproductive painting' — not to be confused with the cliché images cribbed from the mass media and multi-fabricated by the exponents of pop art in the 1960s. Lewandowsky took antiquated pictures and, by painting and drawing, so thoroughly transformed them for his subversive philosophy that the motifs, recycled as fragments, were in tune with the utterly shattered experience of the world and the body in our post-industrial era.

In the 'reproductive paintings' of the 1990s Lewandowsky reworks his childhood experiences in the GDR and reflects upon the 'ideal image of the human being' throughout history using quotations from early twentieth-century anatomical illustrations in popular medical textbooks. (It is no coincidence that Lewandowsky looks up to Max Ernst as his sole authority.) In reality, this 'ideal image of the human being' soon turns out to be an instrument of torture or spiritual coercion. Body surfaces are often depicted with bandages, dressings, scraps of fabric, held together like scars by sutures (*Schlafende Bandagistie (Sleeping Bandage-Man)* 1990). Lewandowsky shows us what we don't want to see: scarred and deformed body parts, a child's deformities, embryonic lumps of flesh, human mutations, a soldier's wounds and mutilations, the excrescences of law and order. The artist thus uncovers an 'image of the human being' that lies concealed both in medical textbooks and beneath the skin.

Lewandowsky also discovers enigmatic and dreadful situations in banal and petty everyday bourgeois existence: he stages situations of suicide, mortal accidents and of unintentional death and reconstructs the deadly and, sometimes, absurd instruments inflicting pain (*Satham* 1998). The quick, mordant wit of all of Lewandowsky's metaphors can strike the viewer unexpectedly and the surprise is all the more painful and lasting.

Carlfriedrich Claus

(b. 1930 Annaberg/Erzgebirge — d. 1998 Chemnitz)

fig. 146

A pioneer of sound and visual poetry, Carlfriedrich Claus was one of the major artists of the former GDR who, though isolated and repressed, created works of

permanent value to the history of art. Born in Annaberg, Erzgebirge in 1930, he quickly got to know the works of avant-garde artists whose practice the Nazis claimed to be 'degenerate': Kandinsky, Klee, Picasso, Léger, El Lissitzky and others. His interest in (secret) code, cryptography and writing, which in the 1950s and 1960s became central to his work, can be dated back already to the early 1940s when he taught himself the Armenian, the Georgian and the Cyrillic alphabets, and Chinese and Hebrew. Around 1948 he got deeply involved into esoteric writings, German and Jewish mysticism, and linguistics (especially phonology). Since 1951 he combined experimental poetry with sound material (Aggregatik). Between 1958 and 1960 he developed 'Letternfelder' and 'Phasenmodelle', sheets of paper filled with typed letters following the principles of concrete poetry. By using manual writing on the 'language sheets', Claus attempted to present the contradictions between spoken and written thought, using also the different calligraphies of his left and right hand. He experimented with the deconstruction of language into its basic sound particles ('Sound Processes'). In 1959 Claus created his first experimental sound recording, *Sprechexerzitiën*. When Franz Mon heard this recording he immediately recognized Claus's importance for revitalizing sound poetry at the beginning of the 1960s. In the 1960s and 1970s Claus belonged to the avant-garde of visual poetry in Western Europe and the United States while in the GDR he remained relatively unknown. In the beginning of the 1980s Claus got interested in the language experiments of the Russian futurists Khlebnikov and Khruchenykh. In the second half of the 1980s Claus began working on his main project *Aggregat K*, which was premiered in the Kupferstichkabinett in Dresden in 1988. In the 1990s he received many awards and in 1991 became a member of the Academy of Arts of West Berlin.

The entire oeuvre of Carlfriedrich Claus is about language — written language in his visual works, and spoken language in his experimental sound poetry. It is a language that is not easily readable: it is reduced to linear abstraction, which emphasises the structures of writing itself. Claus is an important representative of the international movement of visual poetry which developed in the 1950s. Modern art has been dealing with the medium of language since the beginning of the 20th century (e.g. André Breton, Max Ernst). In contrast to the

surrealists' work, Claus's is neither about the estrangement nor about the automatisisation of language, but rather deals with its structural qualities, and the associations connected to these structures. For Claus, 'writing is not only a vehicle for information, but it is rather the vehicle itself that sends out signals, structural informations'.

Carsten Nicolai

(b. 1965 Karl-Marx-Stadt)

fig. 202

Carsten Nicolai studied landscape design in Dresden from 1985–90, and originally worked as a painter in the classical fine arts. From the early 1990s he has worked as a visual and installation artist, increasingly using electronic sound as a kind of hybrid tool to create his own microscopic view of creative processes. His world looks more like a laboratory — constantly morphing in space and time, influenced by the impulses of the media world. Sound — the message as code — becomes the primary theme.

In 1994 he founded *noton. archiv für ton und nichtton* (archive for sound and non-sound) as a platform for related conceptual and experimental projects in music, art and science. In 1999 *Noton* merged with *rastermusic*, a label for electronic music based in Germany, which was founded by Olaf Bender and Frank Bretschneider in 1996. The united artists' label *rastermusic/noton* thus laid down the foundation for a work uniting sound and art design with strong attention to scientific sequences.

Carsten Nicolai records as *Noto/Alva Noto* for *rastermusic/noton*, a label marked by its austere design and releases that tread the line between conceptual art and minimal electronic music. In reality *rastermusic/noton* is not so much a label as a platform for experiments in sonic, spatial and visual arts. *Noton* projects include *Mikro Makro*, an installation produced by Nicolai and Pan Sonic's Mika Vainio, and *Infinity*, a public-space sound project produced for *Documenta X*. The basic elements of *Infinity* are an amorphous sign that Nicolai calls the 'snowman syndrome' and 72 sounds in 45-second loops he calls 'spins'. The quiet, repetitive sounds recall fire engine sirens, whale songs, birds chirping or African drumming. In fact all the sounds have been distorted and processed from everyday devices such as radio, fax machines, telephones, modems, or human speech. The sound waste of our means of communication, multiply

overlaid and mixed, becomes a minimal soundtrack. Regarding the genesis of the 72 'spin' sounds Nicolai says: 'I'm fascinated by sounds, images, and signs, the imaginary forces they develop, and how they directly affect everyone. You can't grasp them or capture them in words, and yet everyone perceives them. They disturb and move you. When you walk through the city, you're accompanied by and wrapped in thousands of sounds, noises, and signals. What do you retain in your filter? What just goes past you?'

One of noton's recent projects is *20' to 2000*, a monthly audio magazine featuring contributions from such people as Komet, Ryoji Ikeda, Thomas Brinkmann, Wolfgang Voigt, Ivan Pavlov, Senking and Scanner. Curated by Nicolai, the series offers a set of snapshots of pre-millennial thought. In September 2000, Carsten Nicolai was awarded the Golden Nica Prize of the Ars Electronica's section for music for the collaborative work *20' to 2000*.

Lutz Dammbeck

(b. 1948 Leipzig)

fig. 116

From 1965–7 Lutz Dammbeck took evening classes at the Academy for Graphic and Book Art (HGB) in Leipzig, and in 1966 was accepted as a student by the HGB. Since 1973 he has worked as a painter and graphic artist, and in 1976 he turned to film (he produced animated films for the DEFA). In the 1970s and 1980s he worked on experimental films, performances, and collages. In 1975, together with Hans-Hendrik Grimmling, he worked on multi-media projects outside of the official art circles in the Leipzig garden studio 'Mogollon'. In 1982–3 he started working on his *Hercules Concept*, which would develop into a totally new genre in the GDR of multi-media performances, or 'media collages' (among other places, these were presented at the Bauhaus Dessau).

Dammbeck initially submitted the script for an experimental film to the Dresdener Studio für Trickfilm (Dresden Cartoon studio) that was resolutely rejected in 1984. He then conceived several new versions as room installations. The *Hercules Media Collage* dealt with the aesthetics of fascism and Stalinism and combined performance art, painting, dance (*Fine Kwiatkowski*), film (Dammbeck's *Hommage à La Sarraz*) and photography. In the *Hercules Media Collage* Dammbeck developed an allegory for his generation's desire for sensual

experience: the 'wilful child' from Grimm's fairy tale displaces the historical hero whom Dammbeck cites in the figure of the ancient Hercules and an Arno Breker sculpture. In a way, this can be seen to pull into the present the complex relationship Germans have to their past. The Hercules metaphor, which until today remains the conceptual framework of Dammbeck's work, was first developed in 1982–3, and was initially inspired by Heiner Müller's text *Herakles oder Die Hydra (Hercules or The Hydra)*. Nietzsche's utopia of the 'Übermensch' and Grimm's fairy tale motif of the 'wilful child' overlap in the figure of Hercules, the ancient demi-god of Greek mythology. Together they form an ambivalent metaphor whose iconographic roots can be traced back to the beginnings of western history and whose multi-faceted historical versions developed in art, literature and philosophy are projected by Dammbeck into the present: as an identification figure for a critical, self-determined appropriation of history in the sense of an 'archaeology of memory'. Dammbeck's work is about nothing less than German history in the twentieth century, focusing especially on National Socialism and the two German states before reunification. Lutz Dammbeck reworks the repressed, he engages in a subtle 'Spurensicherung' (securing of traces), and critically questions 'collective memory' by means of art.

In 1984 Dammbeck was involved in the preparations of the illegal *1. Leipziger Herbstsalon*, which led to a political conflict with official GDR cultural functionaries. In 1986 Dammbeck left the GDR for West Germany. In 1992–3 he completed the film *Zeit der Götter (Time of the Gods)*, a critical reflection about the national socialist sculptor Arno Breker, and in 1995 he finished the documentary film *Dürers Erben (Dürer's Heirs)*, a film about official representatives of socialist realism in the former GDR (among them, painters of the Leipzig School).

Neo Rauch

(b. 1960 Leipzig)

fig. 218

As a student of Arno Rink and Bernhard Heisig at the Academy for Graphics and Book Art in Leipzig (1981–90), Neo Rauch seems to have ignored all revisions of 'Ostblock Art' following the fall of the Berlin Wall. His work is rooted in the German realist tradition. He pursues a characteristic, figurative pictorial language that is inspired by the inventions

of the Dadaists (Max Ernst) as well as the agitprop montages of socialist realism, and which includes comic elements and strategies of international painting.

In mostly large-format compositions, strange events take place: robot-like protagonists wield coloured cables and panels; they construct and survey a fantasy world filled with activity. But the aim pursued by these actors remains consistently obscure. A mysterious paralysis draws the observer irresistibly into its spell. A motionless restlessness hangs over the scenarios presented. They suggest surreal stories, but the autonomy of the exaggerated, clearly accented areas of colour and the often broken reality levels of the picture defy the recounting of a concrete action. Neo Rauch's pictures lead the observer into an irritating world of productivity whose purpose has been forgotten. His figures, composed of comic strip motifs and advertising images, act out an invisible plan, unfolding a multi-layered drama of inner images. His complex narrative imagery is painted in a large format, typically using bleached, chalk-like colours. He redefines what at first sight are familiar images. The atmosphere of his paintings, in which archetypal human figures and desolate utopian backdrops take up pre-eminent positions, is suffused with a sense of hallucination. Tranquil industrial landscapes, motionless tableaux of everyday life, and variations in colour and composition are all part of his cinematic view of the world.

Thomas Wagner states that, in Rauch's works, representational painting has become

a hybrid integrating a broad scope of elements taken from the construction kit of history. Two opposing artistic traditions of the second half of the 20th century are integral parts of this idiosyncratic visual order: Eastern Bloc figurative painting on the one hand and abstract painting of the Western variety on the other.

Wagner continues:

The viewer is confronted with the consequences of particular value systems resulting from the collapse of state-ordained socialism and the reunification of Germany. East meets West, the collective experiment blends with the capitalist game, but also, in terms of painting, socialist realism

and capitalist idealism intermingle. This composite realm conjures strange dreams and visions. The more businesslike one carries out tasks in the sober world of rational adaptation, the louder the noise of the machinery of schizophrenia can be heard droning in the background. It is not possible to retrace a single, overarching sense of meaning. There is no reliable memory of its origin. Everything seems to be communicating reciprocally, all human activity is subject to the law of all-encompassing, uninhibited circulation — and it's precisely this that makes a coherent narrative impossible within such an in homogeneous time-space context. Subsequently, disparate components of a former socialist ideal of engineering stagger about within the vision of an absolute form of painting like flying machines without their pilots. It seems that in the past, communist functionaries possessed a far more determined belief in the technological feasibility of establishing a new world order than the enterprising profiteers of Western calibre.

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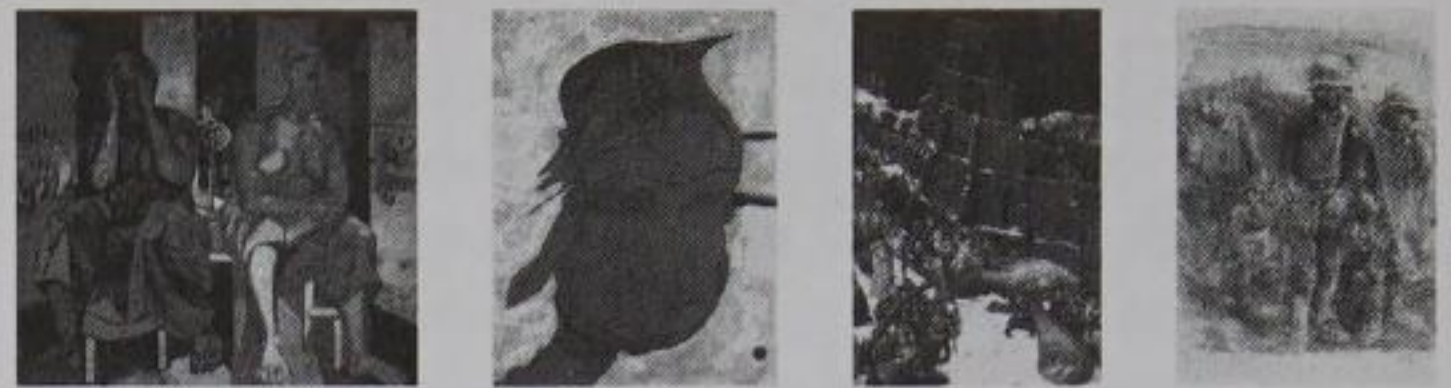
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From left to right and top to bottom:

- Willi Sitte *Calling Women* 1957
- Gerhard Altenbourg *Marie, Marie* 1973
- Werner Tübke *The Early Civil Revolution in Germany* detail:
The Blue Fish at the Tower of Babel started in 1976,
completed in 1988
- Bernhard Heisig illustration for Ludwig Renn's novel *War* 1979
- Wolfgang Mattheuer *The Step of the Century* 1984–5
- A. R. Penck/ Ralf Winkler *Pamphlet* 1974
- Autoperforationsartisten *Allez! Arrest!* 1988
- Via Lewandowsky *Did he die already?* 1988
- Carlfriedrich Claus *Change of Effect: Talking Being Silent* 1988–9
- Carsten Nicolai *Bausatz Noto/∞* 1997–8
- Lutz Dammbeck *Hercules* 1982–3
- Neo Rauch *Education* 1999

Estonia

Sirje Helme

Baltic States

Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were incorporated into the Soviet Union in the summer of 1940. Before the arrival of Soviet troops the three countries were democratic and independent. Thus, the Baltic states share a similar political history in the twentieth century. But because of differences in religion and cultural orientation, the cultural histories of the countries diverge considerably. Unlike Estonia and Latvia, Lithuania is a Roman Catholic country and, despite heavy anti-religious pressure during the Soviet period, the influence of Catholicism has been quite significant, even in the post-war period.

Another difference comes, quite obviously, from our geopolitical situation. Estonia is surrounded mostly by the sea, and there has been a long tradition of communication with the Scandinavian countries and Finland — what is more, our northern neighbours, the Finns, belong to the same Finno-Ugric language group as Estonia and it is not difficult for us to understand each other. Latvian and Lithuanian belong to the small group of Baltic languages, which historically also includes the now extinct Prussian language. Latvia and Lithuania's more intense communication with Central Europe is as logical as the relationship between Estonia and Finland. Of course, it is not possible to trace all the differences between the countries back to their historical traditions alone, but the real influence of these traditions has been more significant than we like to admit. One ready example is the contrast between Lithuanian expressive painting (which originates in German expressionism) and Estonian painting, which is closer to the so-called Nordic constructivist tradition.

Although during the Soviet period the three countries existed in a similar political and social framework, the differences in their cultural traditions

had an effect on the attitude of local artists towards contemporary art. It is interesting to observe the moments of innovation in the art of each country and how these reflected different tendencies in the development of international art. For instance, the development of Estonian art in the late 1960s and 1970s, under the influence of pop art, minimalism and hyperrealism, can be seen as a single fluid movement that was more interesting than what was going on in the two other Baltic countries. In the 1980s, however, the focus of interest had moved to Riga, where art went 'into the streets' and there were numerous actions and happenings. It was the Latvians who at the end of the 1980s started to change the status and representational strategies of photography in comparison to previously accepted ideas about the medium. I would also suggest that in the early 1990s, the baton passed to Lithuanian art, which, instead of focusing on the traditional painting styles that had previously defined the creativity of Lithuanian artists, now welcomed a new world of installations, sculpture, performances, and photography.

Despite such nuanced differences, however, the art of these three small countries (at the time Soviet Socialist Republics) represented a distinctive artistic language within the Soviet empire. The main reason for this was the fact that, before 1940, the Baltic states had been independent, which meant that the Stalinist regime had not been able to kill off three successive generations of intellectuals, as had happened in Russia, but only one such generation, who were either executed or deported to Siberia in the 1940s.

On the other hand, the instinct for self-preservation is undoubtedly much stronger in small nations than in large ones, and for this reason, awareness of the pre-war national state and culture was preserved throughout the difficult post-war

period, helping to form what might be called defence mechanisms — social attitudes and tendencies that because of their stubbornness (but not only because of that) were silently tolerated and to a certain extent accepted, even in Russian ideological circles.

Therefore, when describing the art of the Baltic countries in the period that begins after World War II and extends to the present, there are several defining factors to consider. First, we are dealing with cultures that have been active under two different political systems — fifty years in the totalitarian Soviet state and then, for more than a dozen years as democratic states. This fact must not be forgotten in the construction of any schematic survey, since neither of these periods were the result of ‘normal’ development, but rather of political, social, and cultural interruption. The philosopher Hasso Krull coined the term, ‘the culture of interruption’, to describe this situation. Second, the Soviet Union, unlike such Central European countries as Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, or, especially, the former Yugoslavia, was a completely closed country, and within this closed state, the Baltic republics were the most closed — westward movement was impossible and contributing to the Soviet Union’s ‘melting pot’ of art was not something artists wanted to do. Culture — language and art — was still considered the most effective and strongest means of opposing the Soviet system. For this reason, many developments cannot be properly analysed according to the logic of the West, and certain temporal and ideological shifts must be taken into consideration. Third, culture in the Baltic countries existed, throughout the Soviet period, in a defensive state: it was preservationist, not assertive. Its main focus was not the future, but the past, as if this were a dream world where artistic freedom and national independence originated. This has made for a very complicated relationship between officially accepted art (the mainstream) and nonofficial, experimental art, which can be considered our regional post-war avant-garde. State pressure on the avant-garde could result in pressure on the national identity and culture as a whole. Therefore, the avant-garde was always aware that it bore a certain responsibility, even as it was breaking out of established systems, destroying boundaries, and discovering itself in new and transformed paradigms. Ethical questions with regard to national defensive systems — the limits of destruction, which were determined not only by state reprisals — often forced

artists to make very difficult choices. And finally, our post-war avant-garde art was in fact a ‘repro-avant-garde’, based on photographic images, textual descriptions and explanations. Everything that happened elsewhere came to us through the medium of magazines or, at best, rather snowy television screens. We lacked the immediate emotional experience of the art that was being created outside the Soviet Union, and all the information we had about it was mediated; texts and photos of the work seemed more authentic than the work itself.

The way things were presented in the few issues of Western art magazines that were occasionally available to us (since the Soviet postal system would not, as a rule, distribute any Western publications) became more important than the actual events. If the utopia of modernism still functioned anywhere, it was probably here, in the three Baltic States, in the work of the artists who emerged here in the late 1950s. The radical changes of the 1990s were made by artists who had started working in the late 1980s and who were burdened with a number of conflicts and contradictions — modernism versus postmodernism, misunderstandings between different generations, and reactions to new-found freedoms, which, however, did not make everything possible all at once. The magnificent ‘virtual West’ we had created in our minds disintegrated very quickly. We can probably say that a ‘normal’ cultural development began only in the second half of 1990s, with a new generation of artists who studied under democratic political conditions and who could have a clear idea of the prospects available to them.

Important Dates in the Development of Estonian Art

23 August 1939

The signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact with its secret supplementary protocol defining spheres of interest for both Germany and the Soviet Union. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania come under the Soviet sphere of influence.

21 June 1940

The incorporation of the Republic of Estonia into the Soviet Union.

15 November 1940

All the existing democratic artists’ organisations are dissolved and the decision is made to establish the

Fund of Arts, in order to consolidate the control and leadership of Estonian art into the Soviet system.

21 – 26 March 1950

The Eighth Plenary Session of the Central Committee of the Estonian Communist Party. A number of Estonian artists are condemned as nationalists and expelled from the Artists' Union. Most of them lose their jobs. Art life is concentrated in Tallinn, where the State Art Institute of the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic — the only art academy in Estonia — is opened. (It became the Tallinn Art University in 1989 and then, in 1996 the Estonian Academy of Arts.) The same year marks the definitive acceptance — under the threat of physical persecution — of the official cultural policy of socialist realism.

The late 1950s

The first abstract and surrealist paintings and collages are made in post-war Estonia. Most are never officially exhibited or viewed by the public before the 1990s (at the exhibition *Collage in the 1960s* at the Art Museum of Estonia in 1995, curated by Eha Komissarov). Exceptions to this rule are two paintings by Olav Maran, which were presented in a small group show in the foyer of the Estonian Academy of Sciences, in Tallinn in 1966, and a young artists' exhibition, also in 1966.

1957

The first issue of the art magazine *Kunst* is published. This was the only art magazine published in Estonian in Soviet Union during this period. Its first editor was Milvi Alas and in 1975 Sirje Helme became the editor. The final issue came out in 1996 when financial difficulties forced the magazine to close.

1964

The founding of ANK 64, a group of young artists that included Malle Leis, Jüri Arrak, Aili Vint, and Tõnis Vint. Their goal was liberation from the realism taught at the State Art Institute. They also sought to introduce the general public to modern culture and contemporary art through a series of lectures on twentieth-century art, literature and music, most of which took place at the Art Institute.

Autumn 1966

An exhibition of work by young artists is organised by a group of activists, foremost among whom are Olav Maran and Enn Põldroos. It was decided to present

the younger generation primarily through the display of abstract paintings. After long debates with the local communist authorities, the activists were able to open the show outside Tallinn city centre in a temporarily constructed dance hall used only in summer. This was an essential step forward after many years of prohibition on the display of abstract art.

1966

The first 'happening' noted in our art history takes place at night in the auditorium of Tallinn Secondary School n° 21. It features artists (Jüri Arrak), musicians (Mart Lille, Ivalo Randalu, Kuldar Sink, Lille Randma, Toomas Velmet) and poets (Andres Ehin, Tõnu Kõiv, Tarmo Leppik).

December 1967

The artists' group Visarid is founded in Tartu. The artists didn't want to promote a particular stylistic unity, but an openness to new ideas, communication with the international art world and the involvement of artists in social problems. Visarid was grouped around Kaljo Põllu, Head of the Art Studio at Tartu University, and included, among others, Rein Tammik, Peeter Urbla, Enn Tegova and Jaak Olep. Functioning under the auspices of the Art Studio from 1967 to 1972, the group translated contemporary art literature from the West and introduced it to the local art scene. During this period, they also held seven exhibitions in the café at Tartu University. Visarid is the first, and almost the only, Estonian art group that had a written manifesto. It was written by Kaljo Põllu in 1972, at a time when the group's activities were coming to an end.

1968

The First Tallinn Print Triennial is organised. From 1989 this became an international event.

December 1968

The first pop art event, led by Ando Keskküla and Andres Tolts, takes place in a private house in Tallinn.

1969

The first exhibition by SOUP 69 — a group of young artists that includes Ando Keskküla, Leonhard Lapin, Andres Tolts, Ülevi Eljand and Gunnar Meier — is organised. These were the first artists to bring pop art to Estonia. This show, as well as a second one in 1970, titled *Estonian Avant-Garde Art*, took place at the Pegasus café, a popular meeting place for young

artists and intellectuals in Tallinn. Artists from the group Visarid also took part in these shows, each of which was open only for a couple of weeks.

1973

The unofficial exhibition *Saku '73* is held at the Institute of Agriculture in Saku. It was organised by members of the group ANK 64 with the aim of introducing alternative painting and graphic art in Estonia. Together with more experienced artists such as Jüri Arrak, Malle Leis, Marju Mutsu and Aili Vint, the younger artists Leonhard Lapin and Raul Meel were also involved.

1975

An unofficial exhibition of young artists, *Harku '75*, which encapsulated the development of alternative art (pop art, geometrical art and conceptualism) in Estonia, is held at the Institute of Experimental Biology in Harku. The press is not allowed to publish any articles about the event. Among the organisers were Leonhard Lapin, Silver Vahtre and Jaan Ollik. Eight other artists also took part in the show: Sirje Runge, Raul Meel, Jüri Okas, Kaarel Kurismaa, Villu Järmut, Silvi Allik-Vahtrapuu, Toomas Kall and Illimar Paul. The exhibition opened with a concert by the rock group Mess.

1975

A group show of work by young Estonian artists includes the first hyperrealist paintings to be exhibited in Tallinn. The works of Vladimir Taiger, Tõnu Virve, Irene Virve and Heitti Polli are exhibited. The same year Ando Keskküla opens his first solo show, presenting only hyperrealist paintings. This first wave of hyperrealist painting is different from the next, at the very end of 1970s with work by Jaan Elken and Miljard Kilk, Ilmar Kruusamäe from the Tartu group. To describe the difference between the paintings of Ando Keskküla and Tartu young artists, in 1980 Sirje Helme coins the term 'slide painting'. In the Soviet Union, the term 'hyperrealism' was not officially used and, in 1975, was still not accepted because of the trend's 'Western nature'. In Estonia, the term was first used in 1975, when a television interview with Ando Keskküla was broadcast.

1986

The debut exhibition of paintings by T Group (Rühm T). In the late 1980s, T Group represented an ambivalent

postmodernist way of thinking and in the early 1990s, the group organised a number of performances. The founding members were Raoul Kurvitz and Urmas Muru. The next to join was Hasso Krull, one of the postmodern theoreticians who wrote under the pseudonym of Max Harnoon, and later, in 1987, Peeter Pere, composer Ariel Lagle and several others. The group also included Andres Allan, the poet Lilian Mosolainen, Ene-Liis Semper and Maria Avdjushko.

1989

A group of Finnish curators — Marketta Seppälä, Director of the Pori Museum, the artists Carolus Enckell and Jorma Hautala and Jaakko Lintinen, editor of the art magazine *Taide* — organised *Structure and Metaphysics*. This is the first group exhibition of Estonian artists not controlled by the Soviet authorities. During the following two years, the exhibition travels from Finland to various venues in Germany and Sweden.

1992

The Soros Center for Contemporary Arts, Estonia, opens in Tallinn and begins helping young Estonian artists establish communication with the international art scene. In 1999, it changes its name to the Center for Contemporary Arts (CCA), Estonia.

1994

For the first time, Estonian artists take part in the São Paulo Biennial. Jaan Toomik and Leonhard Lapin are selected by the Croatian curator Želimir Košćević to represent Estonia.

1994

The Cultural Endowment of Estonia, which provides artists with financial support, begins to operate. This remains the most important organisation for financing the arts in Estonia. Most of its funding comes from taxes on alcohol, tobacco and gambling.

1995

Interstanding 1: Understanding Interactivity, the first conference in Estonia to deal with the problems of digital culture, takes place at the National Library in Tallinn. Initiated by the artist Ando Keskküla, who, along with Eric Kluitenberg from Netherlands, organised the first four *Interstanding* conferences through the Center for Contemporary Arts, Estonia. Featuring various activities, including an exhibition,

discussions, lectures, and workshops, these conferences take place every second year. Today, as an 'event in process', *Interstanding* consists of various small workshops, lectures, etc., and is organised in conjunction with the Estonian Academy of Arts (www.interstanding.ee).

1995

The Factory of History, an exhibition and conference in which several internationally known artists take part, is held on Saaremaa, Estonia's largest island. The main exhibition venue is the castle of Kuressaare and the event is organised by Peeter and Eve Linnap. Two years later a similar event, under the title *Invasion*, takes place. This is the beginning of what comes to be known as the Saaremaa Biennial.

1996

Jaan Toomik is selected to represent Estonia at *Manifesta 1*, the European Biennale of Contemporary Art.

1996

Personal Time: Art from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania 1945–1995 opens at the Zachęta Gallery and Ujazdowski Castle in Warsaw. The chief curator is Anda Rottenberg with co-curators Sirje Helme, Helena Demakova and Raminta Jurenaite.

1997

Estonian artists take part in the Venice Biennale for the first time. Three artists, Siim-Tanel Annus, Raoul Kurvitz and Jaan Toomik, are selected by the board of Cultural Endowment. Estonia does not have its own pavilion, so Toomik's installation (a wooden coffin) is displayed on the shore of Grand Canal near the Giardini. Annus and Kurvitz do their performances during the opening days and present their documentation near the Giardini.

1997

The Estonian Institute begins publishing the magazine *Estonian Art* (which appears also in English).

1999

The book *A Brief History of Estonian Art* by Sirje Helme and Jaak Kangilaski, is published by Kunst Publishers. It represents the first attempt (in book format) to offer an understanding of Estonian art during the Soviet period.

2000

The first issue of the bilingual visual art quarterly *kunst.ee* is published. Heie Treier is editor-in-chief.

Ülo Sooster

(b. 1924 Hiiiumaa — d. 1970 Moscow)

fig. 47

Ülo Sooster's life was both influential and tragic. In 1949, he and some others who shared similar ideas were arrested, charged with attempting to escape from the Soviet Union and sent to a prison camp in Karaganda, Kazakhstan. After Stalin's death in 1953, the 'charges' that had been brought against millions of people were reviewed and in 1955 he was set free. For various reasons, he chose to live in Moscow, nevertheless he maintained close relationships with artists in Estonia and particularly in Tartu. Sooster was active in the circles of alternative artists and intellectuals in Moscow and his studio was a meeting place for young artists. Ilya Kabakov, who wrote a book analysing Sooster's work, refers to Sooster as his friend and mentor. In Moscow, Sooster began studying the work of the classic modernist artists, taking advantage of the well-stocked libraries available in the city. He was particularly interested in the work of Picasso, Braque and the surrealists. In 1950s Russia, such interests were highly inadvisable. In 1962, any hope young artists may have had for freer expression was crushed following the 'Manezh exhibition', when their work was condemned by the communist party leader Nikita Khrushchev. From then on, abstract art was officially censored in the Soviet Union.

However, Sooster continued his experimental work in painting. For Estonian artists, he was a bridge between Moscow's unofficial avant-garde art scene and the alternative art scene in Estonia. Sooster mediated ideas, energy and metropolitan experience. In turn the Moscow artists appreciated his knowledge (after all, he had received a classical education in pre-war Estonia), his original gift for analysis and his openness to new ideas. Sooster's favourite images were the egg and the juniper. He saw them as the original images and archetypes of the material world, focusing his understanding of space and time in works dealing with these motifs. Kabakov describes Sooster as a philosopher of 'the living substance'.

Sooster exerted a very strong influence on the formation of the first wave of Estonian avant-garde art in the second half of the 1950s and the early 1960s.

He paid little attention to the restrictions of Soviet ideology and encouraged others to deal above all with the problems of art, which for him were unquestionably of more importance than the problems of everyday life.

Tõnis Vint

(b. 1942 Tallinn)

fig. 69

If Estonian art has a guru, then it is Tõnis Vint. Several generations of artists have sat in his studio, listened to his ideas on art and marvelled at his vast knowledge of different fields of culture. Vint's cultural space and time encompasses the whole planet and all that is known about the development of civilizations. Vint was the ideological leader of ANK 64, a group of imaginative students from the Estonian State Art Institute. Their first (unofficial) exhibition was held in a small space at the Estonia Theatre in 1964. They wanted to break free from the canons of realism and treat art as an autonomous realm on the basis of its aesthetic, not ideological nature. The members of this group eventually became the important artists of the 1970s and 1980s, integrating well with the mainstream in Estonian art. However, Tõnis Vint maintained his absolute independence, refusing to give in to official norms and becoming a symbol of total spiritual opposition, both among his peers and for the younger generation. His apartment was a meeting place for many local dissidents as well as for visitors from Moscow. But his primary importance lies in his artwork. Beginning in the late 1960s with graphic work based on geometric images, Vint was the first Estonian artist to emphasise the independent value of empty spaces and their psycho-geometric potential. These ideas changed our graphic arts and book design considerably. Vint was attracted by Asian art, especially the concept of the mandala, and he used this knowledge to further develop his geometric graphic constructions. In the early 1970s, Vint introduced 'biological architecture' into his graphics, in which he combined figures with geometric structures to create what has been called 'archetypal biomorphic organisms' filled with meaning derived from the artist's increasing interest in mythology. In the middle of the decade, he began to introduce an archetypal female figure into the geometry. Over time, Vint has managed to create an extraordinary

database of different systems of patterns from various cultures throughout the ages. Moving freely through this database, he finds similarities, for instance, between traditional Estonian geometric ornament, and the histories of Celtic and Chinese material and visual cultures. Vint has created his own independent spiritual world, which was able to survive intact despite the pressures of Soviet officials.

This kind of sovereignty served as an example for several generations of artists, and today, Tõnis Vint is virtually a symbol of spiritual integrity and nobility.

Malle Leis

(b. 1940 Viljandi)

fig. 41

As an artist, Malle Leis may be viewed from two opposing positions. On the one hand, she has been one of Estonia's most popular artists, working with botanical motifs in both her serigraphy and painting. From this, one might assume that her work is easy to understand and relatively simple. On the other hand, she belongs to a generation of artists whose early work was determined by pop art and its radical innovations in both form and colour. In Estonia, the acceptance of pop art meant an almost revolutionary reconsideration of fundamental values. For this reason, Leis has a place, too, among the artists who decisively abandoned both and the Paris School (which had been so important for Estonian artists) in favour of the new style of painting.

Like most of the young artists who belonged to the ANK 64 group, Leis started with surrealist compositions in the 1960s. The late 1960s were distinguished by abstract geometric compositions and paintings where one can feel the existential anguish, loneliness and the sense of being trapped — all typical of the time. In the early 1970s, Leis developed her own system of images — decorative plants of extraordinary brightness, enormous blossoms, fragments of rainbows, and female figures. The artist places emphasis on planar images, turning space into a sign, along with everything else: large-eyed human figures; enticing fruit; bouquets of flowers. The beauty she creates lacks sublimation; instead, it resembles pop-like animation and speaks of the attractions of mass society. Leis's work, then, can be read in two different ways. On the one hand, she represents one of the most characteristic attitudes in Estonian art — departure from reality by means of

aesthetic refinement — and this side of her work has attracted hundreds of buyers who have identified themselves not only with its beauty but also with its conscious withdrawal, the social aesthetics of the ivory tower. On the other hand, her work is a good example of the adaptation of the pop art mentality to the local context, providing it with a kind of paranoid insulation, an unwillingness to engage in dialogue with any social paradigm. Her later work adds new layers to her system, with images that are less aggressive and more open.

Leonhard Lapin

(b. 1947 R pina)

fig. 80

Leonhard Lapin is the renaissance man of Estonian art, active for more than thirty years as an artist, architect, poet, art critic, organiser of exhibitions and events, and curator. He has also published articles on the history of art and architecture. Lapin was a major figure in the birth of Estonia's post-war avant-garde movement and his extraordinary energy and ideas have had a considerable influence on the development of Estonian art since the late 1960s.

The late 1960s brought about great changes in the art mentality in Estonia (I am referring to alternative art since officially sanctioned socialist realism found its own means of survival, which is not the subject of this text). The picturesque quality and experimentation of abstract art offered no interesting developments for young people who had begun their studies in the late 1960s. The exhibition *SOUP 69*, which Lapin helped to organise, signalled the powerful presence of pop art in Estonian culture. The importance of this event lay not only in its presentation of works of pop art, but even more in its mentality and the introduction of a new urban environment. These were the changes that would shape the future Estonian art scene, creating a basis for the emergence of different directions and dialogues (unfortunately, this short period of the late 1960s and 1970s was interrupted by a new wave of ideological pressure and Russification in the early 1980s). During this pivotal time, Lapin was simultaneously active in many fields. He displayed pop art at exhibitions and was very interested in Russian constructivism, especially suprematism and the work of Malevich — interests that would help to define his later work. Already at the end of the 1960s, Lapin wrote about 'Union-pop'

(a term he derived from 'Soviet Union' and 'pop art') as a unique phenomenon. Later, international art critics would refer to this as Sots-Art. He started to research the history of early twentieth century Estonian architecture and brought the Estonian functionalist style of the 1930s to the attention of a wider audience. Consequently, it was considerably easier for official ideologists to accept the functionalist architecture created in the 1970s.

Lapin created an extensive series of graphics on the subject of men and machines (*Machine, Woman-Machine* and *Man-Machine*). In 1980, he started work on another long series, *Processes*, in which he developed the idea of empty space and probed the limits of extreme minimalism. In the 1980s, with an extraordinary sensitivity to the spirit of the time, he joined the postmodernist wave in both his painting and graphic work. Toward the end of the decade, he created the series *Signs*, which explores the meaning of state symbols in the cultural context. During this period, he also created several installations. Lapin's role in our culture has been significantly greater than merely that of an artist. He has always been an ideological leader and mentor, an architect of the art scene through several decades.

Ando Keskk la

(b. 1950 Saaremaa)

fig. 91

Without doubt, Ando Keskk la has been one of the leading figures in experimental art in Estonia during various periods. His name is linked with the introduction of pop art in Estonia (his first exhibition was in 1968) — he was one of the ideological leaders, along with Leonhard Lapin and Andres Tolts, of the *SOUP 69* group. As was typical for the younger generation at the time, Keskk la was interested in the surrounding space in both a physical and social sense. As such artwork took on new meaning depending on the artist's existence in the social space. The first consequence of such thinking was a protest, not only against the officially sanctioned art style, but also against the reverence for pre-war aesthetic traditions. Radical thinking and innovative attitudes have characterised Keskk la's work in all his creative periods and in the various media with which he has experimented. Keskk la is primarily a painter (especially in his early period), but he is also a designer, filmmaker and theoretician, and in the 1990s, was an

important organiser on the Estonian art scene. Keskküla's work can be divided into two parts, which are united by a profound fascination with space and reality, with the illusionary physical quality the painter has to deal with, as well as with the relationship between reality and hyperreality and the notion of the simulacrum. During the first period, in both his pop art work and his later hyperrealist paintings (Keskküla was a pioneer of hyperrealism in the Soviet Union in the 1970s, with his paintings of urban landscapes and interiors), a traditional aesthetic code was dominant. In his second period, he moved to a different dimension of realism — the virtual space created by new media technology. His first video was created in 1992. Four years later, he represented Estonia at the 23rd Bienal de São Paulo with the interactive video installation *Untitled* 1996. In 1999, he participated in the 48th Venice Biennale (along with Jüri Ojaver and Peeter Pere) with the interactive video and sound installation *Breath* 1999, in which two elderly men present a kind of counterbalance to the cult of the young and beautiful in the world of advertising. Both works deal with ways of manipulating people and the relativity of the roles of victim and manipulator. Given such areas of interest, it is not surprising that on four occasions Keskküla has been the initiator and curator of *Interstanding*, a series of theoretical conferences on new media organised by the Centre for Contemporary Art, Estonia. He is also the founder of the electronic media centre at the Estonian Academy of Art.

Raul Meel

(b. 1941 Raiküla district)

fig. 54

Raul Meel became an artist quite unexpectedly. From 1964–7, he served in the Soviet Army, where he started to experiment with typewritten images, in 1969 enlarging his sheets using a gouache technique — a sign that Meel had clearly joined the world of alternative art. He began to participate in 'partisan' exhibitions of experimental art, and in 1971, his serigraphic work *Life's Transformations 1–2* was exhibited at the International Biennial of Graphic Arts in Ljubljana. Educated at a technical university rather than an art school, Meel was able to focus his well-developed sense of structure in the arrangement of small elements into larger systems. His method seems to be entirely formal; he uses impersonal elements — points, lines, diagrams and letters — to create

individual works and, later, whole ensembles (as he calls his series, which consist of dozens of pictures).

While Meel is attracted by the principle of organising, he simultaneously endows the formal elements with a multitude of essential meanings, even narratives. These are not just short 'plots', rather they deal with fundamental questions about land and sky, countries and nations. One of Meel's most popular series, *Under the Sky 1973–4*, with additional editions in 1977–92, consists of more than one thousand sheets of serigraphy depicting, with the utmost rationality, drawings that resemble technical charts. At the same time, the blue, black and white colour combination creates associations not only with the sky but also with the Estonian national colours (which were particularly taboo during the Soviet period). From 1986 to 1991, Meel worked on the large series *Windows and Views*, taking his primary motifs from Estonia's coastline. In 1989, Meel finished the series *Embraces*, which again used the Estonian coastline, but this time it bore the marks of embracing hands. Meel has also made several series of minimalist paintings, the most popular of which is *Enchantment and Spirit*, which he began in 1988 and which now consists of some 150 paintings, where he uses, not paintbrushes, but every other kind of brush to achieve different textures and images.

Meel's art practice was never accepted by the art establishment, but its influence on alternative artistic thought has been great. In the 1990s, he organised several performances, using fire as a primary ritual sign and exhibited installations. Meel has recently published his memoirs, in which he describes the pre-1990s situation, the relations between officials and artists, the ideological demands and restrictions, as well as the relationships between artists.

Jüri Okas

(b. 1950 Tallinn)

fig. 151

Today known primarily as a gifted architect who has designed several remarkable buildings, Jüri Okas belongs to the generation of young avant-garde artists who came of age in the 1970s. He was one of the people whose ideas and work changed the image of Estonian art, introducing a pop-culture mentality as well as a new, urban perspective.

Okas has been active in various forms of art. Between 1970 and 1976, he produced, among other things, a dozen narrow-gauge films, mostly recording

performances and the jolly happenings of his friends at the Vääna beach. This was where Okas developed his land art objects. In the 1970s the deserted seashore was an excellent place for experimenting with a sense of space and reality. Such objects later developed into grand installations in exhibition halls where the artist would again use natural materials. Okas's major installations were realized between 1989 and 1991 for exhibitions in Finland, Germany and Sweden. For the biggest work, *Installation 9*, commissioned by the Pori Art Museum for a solo exhibition in 1991, he used elements representing a completely urban environment: asphalt, gravel, neon lights.

In 1974, he began work on a series of photographs that now consists of more than a thousand pictures taken over many years. The series records the abandoned architecture of Estonia. Okas photographs whatever catches his eye — derelict and rebuilt houses, architecture shaped by time, human indifference or a peculiar sense of beauty. The result is *The Concise History of Modern Architecture*, a book published in 1995. In this Okas raises the question of values in modern architecture.

Since 1975, Okas has been displaying his intaglio graphics at various exhibitions. The occasional and amplified visual information we find in his graphic art has led some critics to speak about Okas's work in the context of conceptualism. In the early 1990s, Okas decided to leave his career as a visual artist and seek an outlet for his creativity in architecture. But this decision was not such a radical turning point, for whatever Okas has done, his faithful collaborator has always been space — real, metaphysical, poetic, empty or existentialist. In all his work, Okas has aspired to understand the various forms of existence of space itself.

Raoul Kurvitz

(b. 1961 Tallinn)

fig. 224

In the second half of the 1970s silence steals into Estonian art. In political terms, this time is called the period of stagnation. Estonian art's confinement behind the Iron Curtain became more pronounced, the process of innovation that had started a decade earlier was interrupted as the development of art was steered away from Western tendencies. This silence was broken by Raoul Kurvitz, who, along with the like-minded Urmas Muru, began to work under the name Group T.

Although Kurvitz has never liked being referred to as a postmodern artist, it was largely thanks to the activities of Group T that the ideology of postmodernism was introduced and accepted in the visual arts in Estonia (it had arrived earlier in architecture). Kurvitz, who had studied architecture, began to paint pictures full of allusions to the world of myths. This certainly indicates the influence of both the Italian trans-avant-garde and German neo-expressionism, but his pictures contain more. Kurvitz likes to synthesize various current ideas and can actually show sympathy for quite contradictory ideologies. Kurvitz has brought together *fin-de-siècle* decadence, new age anarchy, yuppie culture, etc. Before long, he was supplementing his paintings with installations and performances. The late 1980s and early 1990s were the high point for Estonian performance art. As with his paintings, Kurvitz's performances used magic ritual as their basic texture, combining signs of power and eroticism. Kurvitz came quite close to the ritual violence of actionism and several of his performances were, in fact, rather dangerous. Kurvitz's way of thinking has been considerably influenced by the activities of Joseph Beuys. In the second half of the 1990s, Kurvitz also experimented with video art, but he decided to concentrate on paintings and installations. During the crisis in Estonian painting in the 1990s, he introduced large canvases covered with various fabrics helping to create new meanings and new possibilities for painting, which had previously been approached mainly from the technical point of view. His most powerful installation to date is *Cathedral for the Homeless 2000*, constructed from old window frames, it provided a space, a monument, and a 'home' for people who had been displaced by the new capitalist society.

Jaan Toomik

(b. 1961 Tartu)

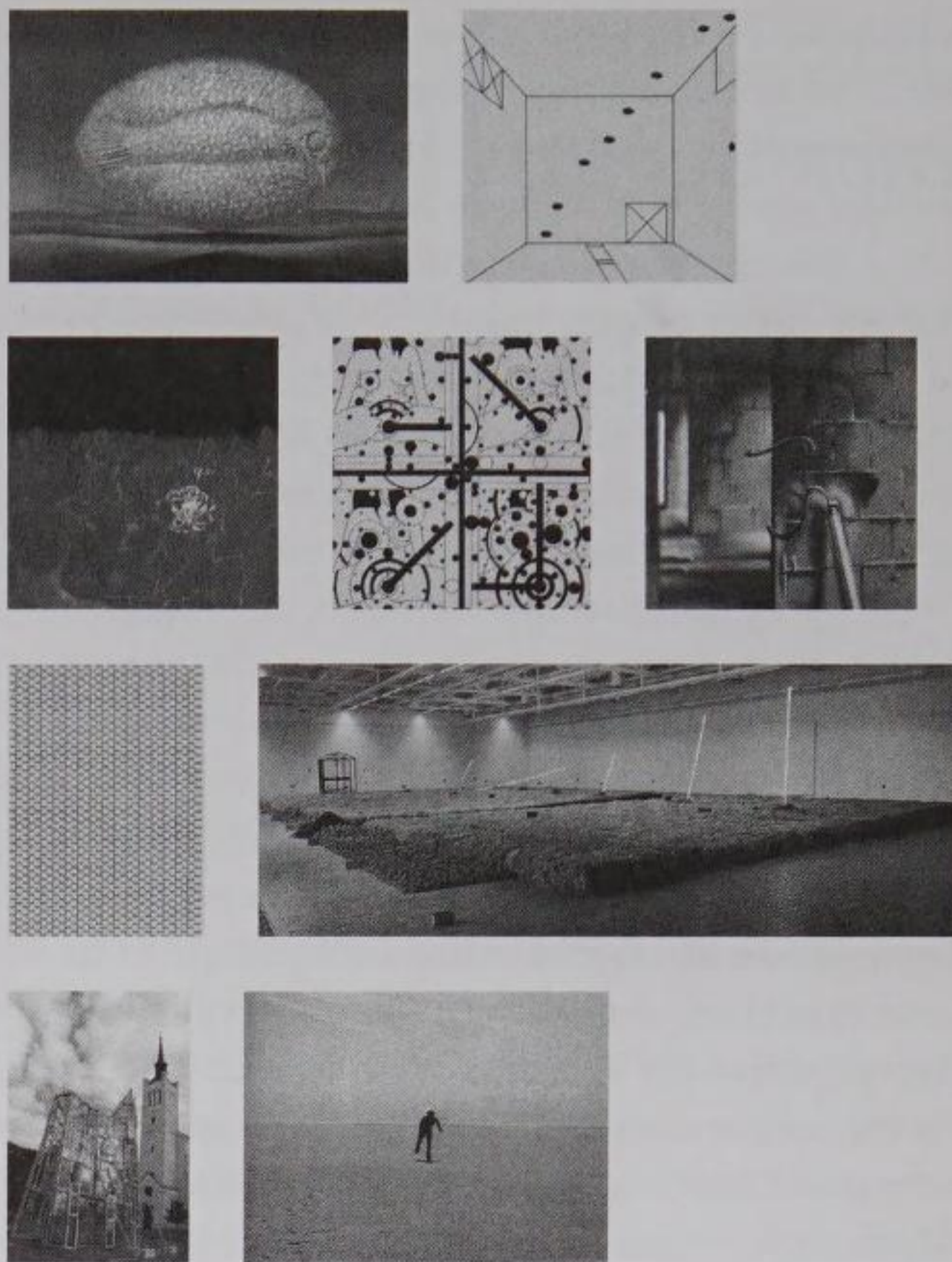
fig. 209

In the 1990s, Jaan Toomik was, undoubtedly, Estonia's best-known artist becoming a symbol in the newly independent country. In 1994, he represented Estonia at the Bienal de São Paulo with the video installation *Way to São Paulo 1994*. This biennial was the first large-scale international art event open to Estonian artists. Toomik went on to participate in exhibitions such as *ARS 95* (Helsinki 1995), *Container '96* (Copenhagen 1996), *Manifesta I* (Rotterdam 1996), the 47th Venice Biennale

in 1997, and most recently, the 50th Venice Biennale in 2003, where he presented the *Peeter and Mart*.

Toomik graduated in painting and, in his brief neo-expressionist period, focused on the depiction of the body. From painting, Toomik found his way to performance art and, eventually, to installations and environmental art. He describes his development as a smooth journey in which no previous experience was discarded. Since 1994, Toomik's main medium has been, for the most part, video. The video installations *Way to São Paulo* 1994, *Dancing Home* 1995 and *Father and Son* 1998 have become classics of Estonian art. The motives of the videos are simple, but strong — a mirror cube floating in the river, mirroring unconsciously everything around — people, trash, sky (*Way to São Paulo*). *Dancing Home* is filmed in the stern of a small ship, in the clamour of motors and dim light. There is only a dancer/artist jumping, which could suggest the monologue-like, rhythmic movements of a shaman. In *Father and Son* Toomik skates naked on the sea, finally melting into the line between the ice and sky. It is nature and ability to create which communicates with the viewer through forms that remain far beyond the 'screen'.

Toomik's creativity contains a strong mystical element, but it is not connected to any specific mythological or religious doctrine. His main theme is solitude, as well as a certain desperate desire to relay, through the activities of his body, primeval states unlimited by time or space, which he has collected within himself in his solitude. This is the reason for his use of video and performance: the intensity and suggestiveness offered by both media provide Toomik with the best means for conveying his deeply individualistic and meditative style. He uses the same elements over and over again in his video installations — water, fire, mirrors, sun — all timeless symbols. By repeating such elements in his installations, Toomik has developed his own post-minimalist artistic code. Toomik has created installations in Estonia, Germany, the United Kingdom, Italy, the United States, Iceland and many other countries. His work always has a very sharp awareness of what might be called the *genius loci*.



From left to right and top to bottom:

- Ülo Sooster *A White Egg* 1968–70
- Tõnis Vint *Constructions 2* 1972
- Malle Leis *Man on the Seashore* 1968
- Leonhard Lapin *Woman-Machine X* 1974
- Ando Keskküla *Building* 1976
- Raul Meel *Hei-Hoi* 1970
- Jüri Okas *Installation 9* 1991
- Raoul Kurvitz *Cathedral for the Homeless* 2000
- Jaan Toomik *Father and Son* 1998

Schrödinger's Cat in the Art World¹

János Sugár

1

The notion of art as a historical, social and, if you like, political construct hasn't always existed. Its existence can be attributed to the increasingly complex organisation of society, which has combated and compensated for its fragmentation with denomination, so that an object which we now consider and name art, using today's meaning of the word, wasn't necessarily considered as such when it was made. Due to an elaboration of social-political forces, the concept of contemporary art was formed, a phenomenon which gave legitimacy to those artworks whose reception wasn't clearly proscribed in their time and which required a contextualizing infrastructure of intermediators and interpreters, independent of the piece itself, who were interested in expanding the definition of art beyond traditional categories and beyond such traditional expectations as beauty and harmony. Entering the stage of public life, the élite functioned to undermine expectations. A continuous re-definition of art caused public taste to be radically altered.

Due to the division of labour, different activities could become independent and each began its own appropriate, self-reflexive development. This process became characteristic of art too, and its effect was the emergence of a duality between high and pop culture, whereby the references to pop culture were widely recognizable and those to high culture hermetic.

Art became free of the restrictive expectation to faithfully reproduce reality after technological advances allowed for an objective means of representation unfiltered by the subjectivity of the artist. This kind of representation was specialized, and enjoying the prosperity of its new freedom, it started to progress independently. In the same way that scientific discoveries revolutionised everyday

experience, so radical changes in artistic perspective and attitude became apparent. Impressionism, cubism, abstraction, expressionism, Dada, surrealism and suprematism represented profoundly different ways of seeing. The individualism of the avant-garde was too radical for a totalitarian mentality based on mass-manipulation and so between 1925 and 1940, the communists and Nazis outlawed avant-garde progress and introduced state art with restrictions on freedom: socialist realism and Nazi realism. During the bloodshed of the two World Wars, the logic of industrialization dictated that war itself was mechanised, even before the mass production of death began. The two wars were immediately followed by a bloodless propaganda or media war, which focused national economies on weapons production, their innovation and trading. The Cold War reduced politics to (arms reduction) negotiations (so that game theory became one of the most important sciences of the Cold War). Contemporary culture became important from the perspective of propaganda.

This situation in the eastern part of the western culture (divided against itself) resulted in an intolerably naïve and rigid state ideology controlling the concept of art to such an extent that it was eventually abandoned.² The western part of western culture accordingly opposed the eastern concept and exhibited a demonstrative support for total freedom of expression. Despite the unfortunate fact that this tactic was also the result of a curious historical nonsense, it brought an immense prosperity to the evolution of art. Questioning the function and definition of art then became the principal basis of art activity. Due to generous state support (or at least to a lack of censorship), practitioners of the arts in the western half of the western world succeeded in sustaining the expansion of arts' boundaries, a process,

which started at the beginning of the twentieth century. During the Cold War period such an infrastructure for the reception and interpretation of contemporary art was established which was able to justify the social utility of subversion.

The emergence of the notion of contemporary art was essentially a consequence of the increased attention given to art's continuous inner terminological redefinition. Galleries appeared as alternatives to museums and to popular culture and advertising began to adopt innovative art's efficiency in grabbing attention. In an environment oversaturated with an indigestible quantity of information, influences and experiences, anything that can attract enough attention (even if only for 15 minutes), has had an incredible importance.

The oppressive states, which had discovered the manipulative possibilities of mass communication and abused the safeguards of the democratic system, gave propaganda a central role, which was maintained throughout the fight against them. Originally conceived of following mass production and the mass media's appetite for news, propaganda easily found its role in the politics of both the representational democracies and the totalitarian, oppressive systems. Naturally, we cannot hide the part played by the innovative, free, experimental and penetrating spirit of contemporary culture in supporting utopias and in sustaining blocked and exhausted intellectual paradigms. But we can neither forget that in its nature, contemporary culture has always sought to critically examine and reveal manipulations. In so doing, a kind of race has been instituted in which contemporary culture attempts, in an increasingly effective and provocative manner, to engender immunity to malicious manipulations. It does so by revealing the techniques of social manipulation that function on the horizon of social consciousness.

Since the start of the twentieth century, new communications media have been constantly updated by new innovations and appliances and have become more affordable and available to individuals. The consequent consumer behaviour, conditioned by this perpetual change, was first represented in the attitudes of avant-garde artists: through subversive interpretation, that is, the radical testing of the bounds of art's genres and techniques. Since even in one lifetime there were many new techniques and tools to become familiar with and use, the requirement of radically researching possibilities,

breaking down conventions and transforming old ways of thinking put avant-garde instruction to the forefront of consumer culture. Radical avant-garde practice has influenced greatly the different spheres of commerce, which consequently had fewer preconceptions, because they needed to use the most effective means to capture consumer attention.

At the end of the Cold War it became evident that state support of contemporary art had been a political decision and not a consequence of the perception that within secularised relations, only culture is able to re-build the connections lost through fragmentation (it is typical that scientific research since the middle of the twentieth century realized the importance of an interdisciplinary approach). No matter how much of a neat conclusion it might have been, the Cold War's end, with its apparent hegemony of the complacent and comfort-loving western countries, didn't imply the end of history but rather the predictable collapse of a paradigm of duality.

The elaboration of western and eastern contexts did not begin within a new and already re-unified western culture. The previous, politically motivated and curious, interest turned into a reluctant provincialism. On the one hand censorial tendencies appeared in those places where freedom of expression had been promoted, on the other hand, art's infrastructure became rigid and limited because of the financial profits made during the market interest in contemporary art. This process has been assisted by a widespread acceptance of the ideological promotion of technology, in which the avant-garde artist's competency in using so called 'new technologies' isn't based on the concept of a free and expressive use of any medium. Rather, it represents an unreflective response to the fast pace of change, which ultimately serves the needs of new innovations with promotional testing. Since the Cold War there has been a general return to the commercial, so today pop culture is conservative.

Globalisation implies the continuous clash of contexts. Complexity obliges everyone to suffer irresolvable contradictions. The philosophical category of *Aufhebung* (sublation) becomes an everyday practice when isolated identities have to appear simultaneously in more than one context, in more than one form. Individual, social and national identities not only acquire new and incredibly efficacious media attributes, but also become multiple and engage simultaneously on a variety of levels. Multicultural homogenization can generate surprising and accidental

contexts whose reception confounds well-established mechanisms of social self-definition. Contexts are chained to space and time, and in this sense are similar to living in society.

Modern artists were only able to depart from the isolation of the studio after the realization of a small technical innovation: the tube of paint. At this point, modern art could branch off from the teleological holistic concept, perceive nature in an individual way and arrive at society; a second nature, transformed by living together. Social-political art is that which demonstratively faces the consequences of being connected to a concrete context, to which the artistic gesture can be interpreted as a direct response. Interpretation of the work against a background of concrete and real social references makes the artistic gesture immediately understandable. At the same time it's necessary to accept that concrete contexts are ephemeral, so that it should be understood that the most important characteristic of art works created in this way will be that of the contextual vacuum created after the actuality has passed. A realization of this contextual vacuum is, if you like, the most important task for each artist. The differences are in the way that they achieve this goal; randomly, through private mythology or through the use of ephemeral and perishable social conflicts. Both strategies are authentic, indeed, avant-garde artists' famous capacity for adaptability, also called 'total competency', demands the adoption of both of them. It is also demanded by the distracted condition of the fragmented, globalized information societies, which can pass by a phenomenon and various forms of human suffering with a self-assured indifference.

The fundamental component of art is attention. We already know what kind of utopian attention can be generated through prohibition. What will the future of this attention be in the era of social reorganization?³

2

There is a totally invalid presumption, namely that the fall of communism caused effects only in Eastern-Central Europe. The fall of the Iron Curtain was the long awaited end of a paradigm (the Yalta, or the 'three-player-game' paradigm), the end of almost fifty years of division within western culture. This division led to a hostile separation between the rich, mainstream 'west-western' countries and the peripheries, the poor, communist 'east side'⁴ of

western culture. In the last chapter in this three-player-game the main battlefield was propaganda, and contemporary art played the role of a sort of a 'Manhattan project'.⁵ The west-western politicians were totally unprepared for the end of the game, an end in which they also have had to give up their comfortable positions. They thought that they had simply won, and everything would continue as it was, and they had no doomsday scenarios. This led to several tragedies, including the war in the Balkans. This is the so-called 'Fukuyama failure' of west-western intellectuals.

The role, the social function, of art is no longer the same as before. After the dismantling of the Iron Curtain, massive global communications, and the increasingly seamless nature of politics/culture/entertainment, the cultural environment changed completely after its comfortable Cold War situation. Since 1990 a lot of new states emerged in Eastern and Central Europe, and the political élite changed everywhere, and along with their new priorities they looked at contemporary culture as a vehicle for constructing/reconstructing national identities.⁶ On the west-western side significant cutbacks took place, the magnanimous state support of artistic radicalism stopped, and with this downsizing the arts infrastructure integrated into the attention industry.

Maybe the single most important thing that changed in Eastern and Central European art after the fall of communism is that contemporary art became less context-bound. Previously there was a very repressive social organisation, a manipulated public life and censorship, and because of this the general public lost its trust in official forums and learned how to read between the lines, how to take the context of repression into consideration. This formed a strong social organisation rooted in a kind of social solidarity, but now this is over. Recent works can be understood with greater ease, with less attention, because they are less context-based, more viewer-friendly, and one doesn't have to know the whole troublesome history of a 'complicated' country to decipher an art piece.

But the situation today is far from that naïve and optimistic consumption-centeredness on which the Cold (propaganda) War alignment had been built in the West. Now, in this changed new situation the traditional value systems of the popular and the élite have been overturned; the popular has become the dismal terrain of political and commercial marketing manipulations and the previously rightfully scorned

elitism is rendered progressive, locally capable of resisting manipulation, a positive value. From the popular manipulative demagoguery and commerce can be expected, while from the élite comes direct, i.e. non-mediated (sensory, real-time) experience that can only be directly lived through.

The role of the artist today is to cause problems, producing disturbances in the present, especially nowadays in a world where an easy entertainment aspect is more and more taking over. The artist today should provoke and produce that which is not understandable in an environment where everything is consumable, light and comfortably transparent. In a totally globalized world where both infotainment and political/commercial marketing work in a technical/medial convergence, art, apart from its medium, should maintain a critical attitude.

I consider it neither an accident nor a condemnable attitude that there are only 'west-western' artists in representative positions within the scope of attention (framework) of western visual arts. After the disappearance of the Cold War set up, Eastern Europeans lost their political sex appeal and the attention of the West has shifted towards new territories. No one seemed to be interested anymore in deciphering and integrating the complicated Eastern European contexts. We also have to ask whether we were following an outdated model in so far as we consider the west-western publicity as an ultimate target and if it was possible to insert Eastern and Central European visual art back into the 'official' (west-western) art history? Is it worth recontextualizing something following an invalid model?

3

Hungary entered the twentieth century to face a national shock, in accordance with the Paris Peace Treaty it lost two thirds of its territory in 1920. Before that Hungary was a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and looking back from a historical distance we can say it was somehow (until 1920) the best-functioning Central Eastern European community. This shock led the country inevitably to World War II and gave an easy argument to populist politicians when Nazi Germany promised restitutions to the Hungarians. The end result was that the Yalta Treaty placed Hungary among other countries in the Soviet world. This process damaged the national identity, as from a big country Hungary became a small one and dependent on stronger allies?

With the end of World War II a short democratic period started in Hungary, the so-called 'coalition times,' in which besides the Communist Party all the other democratic parties governed the country until 1948–9. In the official lingo the 'year of turn', in other words a communist take-over, came in 1949 leading in a very short time to a brutal Hungarian Stalinism. The atrocities of the latter led to the spontaneous and courageous uprising in 1956. The '56 Revolution was a watershed for Hungary and became a long-standing trauma for the politicians as well.

Then came the regime of János Kádár, who after the bloody repression of the uprising, in which about 300 people were executed, introduced a special Hungarian type of 'goulash communism' starting in the 1960s — a kind of novelty, a communist-type consumerism fuelled by western loans and credit. After 1956 the politicians had to provide some perspective, some optimism, to the people — and for themselves as well. That is why Hungary could become a bit more liberal while the other Eastern Bloc systems became more rigid.

Hungarian censorship was based on three principles: support, tolerance, and banning.⁷ In practice the communists used the system intelligently, banning only a few, tolerating a lot and continuously dissolving previous bans. The heavily censored intellectuals in Hungary were still less harassed than in the other communist countries but still many were forced to emigrate. Although people were only allowed to travel every two or three years; informal information traffic was relatively strong and cultural life in general was quite pleasant in Budapest — there were always exhibitions in state museums and galleries (mainstream and classical), there was a good selection of classical concerts as well as accessible movies. There was a broad selection of well-translated literature available (most of the tolerated and banned writers did translating or editorial jobs for a living). The situation concerning social sciences and philosophy was the opposite. Although the most important western authors were translated, only three hundred numbered copies were published, and made available only for the selected party members.

The important cultural decisions were made in the highest echelons of the Communist Party. Public culture was strongly controlled: there was censorship but a vital underground art scene — a so-called 'second publicity'⁸ — with a strong moral position emerged and organised exhibitions, pop

and contemporary classical music concerts and performances as well as produced and distributed samizdat publications. Looking back, it was like an incubator or a resort: it wasn't difficult to survive, there was plenty of time for talks, meetings, discussions, making contacts, partying and of course in most cases not the slightest hope of a practical result. There were no contacts with the so-called 'first publicity', which was the realm of the general public. It was only access to the general public and the mainstream media that was censored, not cultural production itself. The single and most cruel restriction for culture was in fact the blocking of the avenues needed to reach a broader public. As a result there was no competition between the old and new, no aggressive cultural memes, no random spread of cultural inspiration. As censorship prevented and controlled distribution and publicity only a few hundred people (mostly insiders) could benefit from the potentials and output of this intellectually booming period.

It's somehow like a philosophical problem: can anything be valid if no one knows about its existence? Schrödinger's cat in the art world. This is exemplified exquisitely by the case of samizdat activities, which due to the necessary conspiracy required for its production and distribution, hardly reached beyond those who were already involved. This situation caused serious damage, not just in art, which became hermetic and context-bound, but also in the cultural reception of the general public (which is rather uninformed and conservative). If someone in a library goes through the papers and magazines of that period she or he won't find any reference, any news or mention about what was really happening, what we consider important now. It's tragic, because the majority of the decision-makers and politicians of today — the descendents of the so-called 'average' people of yesterday who had no extra information source and who relied on the state media during the socialistic times were/are unaware of the activities of the 'second-publicity'.⁹

Today in Hungary, as it is general, I think, in the former Eastern Bloc countries, the previous strong, censorship generated attention on art production has disappeared, and people are not able to invest energy into reading between the lines. The perception of contemporary art is now characterized by a special kind of 'attention-deficit-disorder', where the non-commercial activities are less visible.

Lajos Kassák

(b. 1887 Érsekújvár — d. 1967 Budapest)

fig. 35

Beginning with 1945 I have to mention two avant-gardists who both earned their reputations internationally in the 1920s and 1930s: Lajos Kassák and Sándor Bortnyik (b. 1893 Marosvásárhely — d. 1976 Budapest). Kassák, a poet, writer, editor, publisher, and activist, who had been one of the most influential figures of the Hungarian avant-garde scene from 1910. He had worked in many areas of visual arts, from typography to sculpture, though he is mostly known for his prints, collages and paintings and of his method called *Bildarchitektur* (*Picture Architecture*), which he developed in the 1920s. He had been founder and editor of several magazines starting with *TETT* (*The Deed*) in 1915, which also meant the launch of his literary career.¹⁰ He was one of the founding members of the artist group 'Európai iskola' (European School) in 1945 and was active till 1949 as the editor of cultural/literary magazines such as *Új Idők* (*New Times*), *Kortárs* (*Contemporary*), *Alkotás* (*Creation*).

Between 1949 and 1956 Kassák refrained from cultural life and lived in voluntary exile. During his period he made series of ink drawings. After 1956 he returned to public life and it was at this time that he became acknowledged internationally and was invited to the big Dadaist exhibition in Paris (1966–7) with fifteen works. Because of his staunch position he had become a symbol of purity and moral stance among the younger generations of artists in Hungary.

Bortnyik's career is in many ways similar but there are a few significant differences. He started in 1910 as a promising graphic designer and subsequently studied with the best painters of his time. He met Kassák through joining the circle of *MA* (*Today*) magazine in 1917 and became an avant-gardist and kept close to this circle after he had emigrated to Vienna in 1920. From 1922 he moved to Weimar where the Bauhaus and his acquaintance with Van Doesburg had a strong impact on him. He returned to Budapest in 1925 and was the founder, writer and stage-designer of the *Zöld Szamár* (Green Donkey) absurd theatre. Being a designer he maintained a certain distance towards art and his collages and paintings always had some grotesque elements. He became internationally known with his paintings made between 1920 and 1930. As an active leftist after 1945, he was fully committed to the communist (cultural) policy and in

contrast to his mentor Kassák, he became a favourite of the Hungarian communists, and for twenty years earned all the state prizes and awards alongside being the director of the Hungarian Fine Arts Academy between 1949 and 1956. He is well-known for his satirical series, where he either targeted the classics of modern art (*Korszerűsített Klasszikusok/Modernized Classics*, 1953–4) or different social phenomena (*Korunk hőse/The Hero of Our Time*, 1963, *Demagóg/Demagogue*, 1969). At the end of his life he made replicas of his early work.

4.1

Miklós Erdély

(b. 1928 Budapest — d. 1986 Budapest)

fig. 104

Erdély was an architect, filmmaker, poet, writer, conceptual artist, and painter, and is unquestionably the most important Hungarian artist of the second half of the twentieth century. He had an unprecedented approach, moving away from the poetical or scientific, interdisciplinary conceptualism towards innovative, post-*Informel* painting.

He started to make films from 1968 applying chance cut and montage theory and between 1974 and 1985 he made five long 16mm films,⁴¹ creating a new category of ‘cognitive film’, a (long-awaited) step beyond experimental film. Similarly to Gábor Bódy, he attended János Zsilka’s seminars on linguistics and was interested in the semiotics of film.

Since the 1960s he participated in semi-legal exhibitions with ‘text(ual) actions’, photos with thesis, screenings and action-like readings, objects and environments like (*Rejtett paraméterek/Hidden Parameters*, 1968) and in the mid-1970s curated two shows (*Möbius* and *Montage*) in the Young Artists Club in Budapest. Also during the deepest stagnation in 1975 he started a unique activity, a ‘creativity course’, a kind of art pedagogy (*Kreativitási gyakorlatok/Creativity Exercises*), with artist Dora Maurer for young people, and two years later Fafej (*Fantáziafejlesztő gyakorlatok/Phantasy developing exercises*). These experimental workshops, which integrated diverse influences from philosophy to artistic methodologies, later developed into the Indigo group, from 1978, which also meant a personal solution for Erdély to create and maintain an intellectual discourse. The work that perfectly illustrates how an artist full of ideas could feel in a repressive

environment full of aborted ambitions is one of his contributions to the retrospective show of the legendary *Iparterv* generation.⁴² It is a diagram titled *The Proportionment of Ideas and Their Realisation* 1979 that shows the relation between his ideas and their realisation in time.

From the early 1980s until his death in 1986 he worked with in drawing, installation art and painting. He took part in *Orwell und the Gegenwart* in Vienna (Museum des 20er Jahrhunderts) in 1984 with an installation *Hadititok/Kriegsgeheimnis* (*Military Secret*), which was the only work constantly on view in the Ludwig Museum Budapest.

Erdély influenced most of his contemporaries in different ways, and there is a rather broad consensus on his significance within the Hungarian art scene. Many of the leading personalities in Hungarian art either belonged to his circle or were in contact with him. Meanwhile his career was typical in that he had no official acknowledgement, and remained totally unknown to the majority of the general public. Since his art action during the 1956 revolution, when he put out boxes in damaged Budapest storefronts with a note saying: ‘Unguarded Money. The purity of our revolution allows us to collect money this way for families of the victims of the fights’, he had irritated the authorities. Unfortunately up until now neither Erdély’s activity nor his legacy has become part of the conventional wisdom of the Hungarian intelligentsia.

4.2

Tamás St. Auby (Tamás Szentjóby, Stjauby, Emmy (Emily) Grant, St. Aubsky, T. Taub, etc.) / **IPUT** (b. 1944 Fót. Lives and works in Budapest.)

fig. 158

St. Auby started as a poet and conceptualist and though he has been extraordinarily influential has remained the most indefinable figure of the Hungarian avant-garde. He made happenings, readings, actions, lectures, and films and was involved in concept art and Fluxus activities (flux-concerts, etc.).

In 1968 he founded International Parallel Union of Telecommunication (IPUT) and become its interim dispatcher.⁴³ In 1972 he started to deal with ‘strike’ as a theme that led to the *Létminimum Standard Projekt* (LSP) (*The Subsistence Level Standard Project 1984 W*) in 1974. He was not only strictly censored because of his artistic radicalism but was arrested in 1974 (together with György Konrád and Iván Szelényi for taking part

in the samizdat movement) and a year later the authorities forced him to leave the country. He lived in Switzerland and in 1975 he resided in Geneva, where he made friends with the collector André Huilliers, who not only supported his *Subsistence Level Standard Project 1984 W* but also bought most of his works organizing the collection according to St. Auby's 'non-darwinist psychocromatic' method. In 1977 he broke with commercial galleries and refrained from any kind of commercial involvement and from 1980 he started to organize the *Non-Art Art Strike*.

During his emigration he had no professional contacts with Hungary and returned only in 1991, when he applied to run a small (non-commercial) Budapest gallery, Bartók 32, which under his one and a half-year directorship in the spirit of *Unikon (Single Artwork)* became a leading exhibition space, presenting mainly young, emerging artists. In 1991 he was invited to lecture at the newly established Intermedia Faculty of the Hungarian Fine Arts Academy in Budapest, where he has taught ever since. Not surprisingly, given the above, he made a strong impact on the young art scene of the 1990s, both with his art and his other activities.

In 1992 he realised (after a concept by Julia Lorrensy) the project *Statue of Liberty's Soul*, which was a huge white sheet with two black dots (in the position of eyes) on the Budapest Statue of Liberty. This was the time when the removal of monuments erected during the communist period was on agenda, but this project was the only attempt to reflect on and change not the physical place but the spiritual content of such pieces.

In 1996, St. Auby was invited to exhibit using the entire space of the newly renovated Budapest Kunsthalle (at that time under the directorship of László Beke). He showed 3,334 'Badrawing' (with 'Badtitles'), all of the same size, on the walls. The only object was a monumental modernistic wooden throne. The title of the show was *CATABASIS SOTERIOLOGIC*. It received no critical feedback among art professionals.

His latest work is a curatorial statement: he professionally researched and collected the documents of the unofficial art scene between 1956 and 1976 and presented them in a specially designed transportable multimedia study environment. St. Auby put a lot of work into properly documenting this very exciting section of the Hungarian unofficial art, which hasn't been satisfactorily researched by art historians. The

name of the project, *Transportable Intelligence Increase Museum 2003*, has been presented in Budapest twice and has since then been exhibited at venues abroad including the BAWAG Foundation, Vienna.

4.3

György Jovánovics

(b. 1939 Budapest. Lives and works in Budapest.)

fig. 51

Jovánovics was one of those few who were admitted to the Budapest Fine Art Academy and after finishing his education he studied abroad in Vienna and Paris between 1964–5. Ever since he has regularly lived abroad including an extended stay in West Berlin with a DAAD grant between 1980 and 1983.

Mixing techniques of classic sculpture and anti-sculptural experiments many of his works are made out of plaster of paris. One of the most significant early pieces was *Részlet a Nagy Gilles-ből (Detail from the Great Gilles)* 1967 taking the painting of Watteau as its starting point. In 1968 he was the catalyst of the *Iparterv*, which became a landmark exhibition for his generation, and where he presented his *Fekvő figura (Lying Figure)* 1969, a white plaster cast of a man lying on red plastic foil. The piece represented something completely different from the general attitude of the time, combining minimalism, pop art and conceptuality in a very original, unusual and simple way.

Another significant piece was a large, irregular, 'table-cloth environment' plaster cast, which followed the complicated floor plan of the exhibition space in 1970: *Object Following the Irregular Floorplan of Adolf Fényes Gallery*. Recently in the framework of an Artpool project called *Context* Jovánovics referred to this piece as 'the best show of my life'. Miklós Erdély praised the piece as the one where Hungarian art reached international quality. From the mid 1970s he moved towards a kind of self-made narrative employing projections and illusory spaces in his black-and-white photographs, which served as a more refined and sophisticated context for his fictional female character, a life-size, dressed-up plaster figure called Liza Wiathruck that later also appeared as part of autonomous installations.

At the end of the 1970s Jovánovics surrounded his enigmatic narrative with tangibly real setting in the form of a *camera obscura* that consisted of a system of mirrors and casts.

During a stay in Berlin he started making larger, architectural, abstract plaster reliefs followed by some large-scale installations based again on a complicated system of art historical references and quotations. Since 1991 he has been teaching sculpture at the Hungarian Fine Art Academy. In 1992 he won the competition for the *Memorial of the Martyrs of the 1956 Revolution* — with the resulting work considered by many as his most important sculptural statement. In 1995 he represented Hungary at the 46th Venice Biennale.

4.4

Balázs Béla Studió, Gábor Bódy, Péter Forgács

In this context the famous film studio, the Balázs Béla Studió (BBS), needs to be mentioned, which was established in 1960 and soon became the home of experimental films (also of documentaries and poetic short films). Since it had a triennially changing five-member board, from the 1970s onwards artists from other fields, for example visual artists and musicians, could realize short, experimental films there. The BBS was a unique phenomenon in the Eastern Bloc: a little, state-sponsored island for progressive use of filmic expression challenging political tolerance (they were officially absolved from the obligation to present completed films). The BBS produced critical documentaries and independent/experimental short films, and though the films were rarely shown in public the studio made good use of its relative freedom.

One of the most important board member was the filmmaker Gábor Bódy (b. 1946 — d. 1985), who remains one of the Hungarian directors that is best known internationally (a group including Miklós Jancsó, Márta Mészáros, István Szabó, Béla Tarr, Ildikó Enyedi and others). Bódy represented a very strong intellectual attitude in filmmaking. In 1972 he took his degree in philosophy and was then admitted to the Academy of Theatre and Film Art in Budapest and the same year made his first experimental film at the BBS. In 1973 he organized *The Film Language Series*, the first experimental film project of the BBS, involving other filmmakers, artists, musicians and writers to collaborate (for the first time) in making new films. (Later this series was shown in Amsterdam at De Appel in 1979.) His broad range of activities earned him the role of a central figure from the mid 1970s until his suicide in 1985.¹⁴ From 1975 onwards his films earned him international success; he received several festival prizes for his feature films, which included

Narcissus and Psyche 1980 and *The Dog's Night Song* 1983. Although from 1982 Bódy lived more or less abroad, mainly in West Berlin, during the 1980s he energised the Budapest art scene in many ways. He initiated projects and represented a fresh, co-operative internationality. His innovation was in linking technology with philosophy, a link which appears in his films as a very consciously controlled visuality. And it may be because of this that he understood what significance video art could have. From the early 1980s he became a leading figure on the international video art scene. He was the founder of *Infermental*, a video art magazine on VHS tapes, and several other international co-operations, like EMAN (European Media Art Network), he published books on video, and taught at the Film und Fernseh Akademie in West Berlin. Besides making feature films he continued producing video works and one of his aims was to produce 'philo-liro-mitho-clips'.¹⁵

One artist who can be considered a follower of Gábor Bódy¹⁶ is the video artist Péter Forgács (b. 1950 Budapest). Since 1983 Forgács has run the *Private Photo and Film Archive*, and he became famous with his carefully edited compilations of Hungarian private or family films made between 1920 and 1945. The first piece of his *Private Hungary* series was made in 1988. Beside this series he also makes documentaries, and from the 1980s videos and video installations. Since the early 1990s he has received several awards at the most important international festivals including the World Wide Video Festival Award in 1990 and the Viper Film and Video Festival Video Award in Lucerne in 1993.

4.5

Chapel Exhibition Series

One very important achievement of the Budapest-based graphic artist and sculptor György Galántai (born 1941) was the *Chapel Exhibition* series¹⁷ at the deserted chapel Balatonboglár (at Lake Balaton) from 1970–3, which he rented for fifteen years from the Catholic Church from 1968. This exhibition-and-event series served as the most important forum for artistic meetings and exchanges for four years, until the Ministry of Interior Affairs finally closed it down. Several years later, in 1979, Galántai established *Artpool*, an archive and started a samizdat art magazine and newsletter *AL (Aktuális Levél) (Actual Letter)*¹⁸ in his own apartment with his wife Júlia

Klaniczay as a consequence of his mail art activity. Since then *Artpool* has organized exhibitions, events, and made publications mainly in co-operation with the international mail art community. After 1989 with substantial support from the Budapest City Council they opened a new space in the city centre, with the most extensive, professionally-organised archive (including sound and video documentation) on Hungarian non-official art between the 1960s and the 1980s, plus one of the largest and best-known archives of mail art. They organise events, festivals, and exhibitions on a regular basis and have run a small P60 Gallery since 1997.¹⁹

4.6

Gyula Pauer

(b. 1941 Budapest. Lives and works in Budapest.)

fig. 94

Pauer started as a sculptor with no academic background. In the 1960s and 1970s the admission to the Hungarian Academy of Fine Arts in Budapest was exceptionally exclusive. He worked as a decorator and from the early 1970s he started to work as a stage designer for what at that time was the most progressive theater, in Kaposvár. His stage designs revealed strong visuals and concepts and had a big part in making the theatre a success. Parallel with this activity he developed the concept of 'pseudo-art',²⁰ which has its roots in pop art and minimal art combined with the sociological and philosophical aspects of the 'pseudo'.

In 1978 Pauer created the *A Forest of Demonstrating Signs*, 131 signs of the type protesters use to hold at demonstrations, stuck in 400 square metres of ground in natural surroundings. The texts on these signs were rather poetic. The original was destroyed by the authorities the day after it had been set up.²¹

From the 1980s on Pauer concentrated on the human body, its reduction and transformation creating the pseudo sculpture of *Maya* and he became more interested in plaster-casting the naked human body. Besides his sculptural work he is now an independent art director and set designer.

4.7

Indigo Group²²

The Indigo group was active between 1978–86 in Budapest and was organically integrated in the progressive art scene of this period. Members of the

group were young artists and intellectuals whose activity was barely tolerated and sometimes prohibited outright. The name of the group is a shortened form of 'INterDISzciplináris GONDolkozás' (Interdisciplinary Thinking) and at the same time it refers to Miklós Erdély's favourite medium for drawing on carbon paper (indigo). Indigo group as a medium and a way of thinking combined the essential ideas of the avant-garde art of the 1970s: reiteration, sequence, conceptuality, intermedia. The leader and spiritual father of the group was Miklós Erdély, and among the group members were artists, film makers like András Böröcz, Ildikó Enyedi, László Révész, János Sugár and János Szirtes. We can regard the consecutive *Krecso* (*Creativity Exercises*) and *Fafej* (*Fantasy Developing Exercises*) — art education courses conducted by Miklós Erdély — as antecedents of Indigo that can be conceptually paralleled with the results of creativity research both in the USA (Watzlawick *et al.*) and in Europe (E. Landau) and with the mentality of Fluxus (J. Beuys, R. Filliou). Dóra Maurer and György Galántai also contributed to the direction of the *Creativity Exercises*. The way of thinking developed during these courses was objectified in exhibitions. At the beginning, the participants made environments collectively, and in some cases they also presented performances at the openings of exhibitions. Through devising and creating these environments the group functioned as a creative entity, using the paradoxicality of collective artwork. The exhibitions were characterized by questioning and trying to expand the limits of the contemporary concepts of art, and primarily concentrated on mediation. The group's creative method was built on processes well-known nowadays, such as brain-storming and group therapy. At the beginning of the 1980s the group's inner collaboration gradually loosened, and their exhibitions consisted of individual works mostly belonging to the genre of installation and object. In 1981 they participated in *Post-Conceptual Tendencies* as part of the *Tendencies* exhibition series that represented the Hungarian art of the 1970s.²³ In 1982 they were invited to the Paris Biennial but were refused official permission to leave. In 1982–3 they worked at the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest where, by creating a drawing course, they practised drawing's imitative-constitutive and subjective-gesture-like characters. Their exhibitions usually took place at cultural and educational centers of factories and at popular clubs of the underground culture of that period (i.e. The

Young Artists' Club, The Bercsényi Club). The group established an alternative to the academic art education in the *détente* decade, which also provided a spiritual community for Miklós Erdély, who received extremely little academic appreciation during his life.

4.8

András Böröcz

(b. 1956 Budapest. Lives and works in New York.)

László L. Révész

(b. 1957 Budapest. Lives and works in Budapest.)

fig. 118

Both studied painting at the Hungarian Academy of Fine Arts in Budapest and were members of the Indigo group. Along with the painter Gábor Roskó they combined strong painterliness with an ironic, subversive narrativity, something, which had no real tradition in Hungary, and was completely new at that time. Partly as an extension to their painting they developed a special type of performance in which they usually focused on and analysed one topic (such as *Horse*, Budapest 1980; *Sphere — Einstein and Frankenstein*, Budapest 1981; *Max and Moritz*, Budapest 1984; *Flee I*, St. Marks Church, NYC 1986 and *Dawn Carlos*, Kassel 1987) in the most diverse ways, and through a series of actions set in a theatre-like environment they constructed an absurd narrativity. These productions also included films and usually took about half a year to prepare.

They always asked the then young philosopher, Gábor Bora, to read his texts but also invited other artists to participate, including musicians, singers, and dancers beside others.²⁴ In most of their performances they appeared in costumes among clumsy props. Their larger-scale performances were like strange revues organized by two bad boys. They invented something, which could eventually lead (in a friendlier environment) to a new type of theater.

In 1986, together with the painter and performer János Szirtes, they got invited to the *Fête Permanente* section of *Documenta 5* being the first Hungarian artists to be invited.

They stopped making performances in 1987. Since then Böröcz has lived in Brooklyn making grotesque sculptural works mainly using carved pencils. Révész has stayed in Budapest, and as a painter has developed further his narrative style greatly influenced by digital and computer art of the 1980s. He has also worked for TV programmes, made

experimental films, video installations and been involved in different multimedia projects.

4.9

In the 'East-Western' societies the cultural peripheries turned to each other instead of turning to a completely impenetrable Centre. They started to communicate with each other in such an efficient way that they created a second (underground) form of publicity. This on the one hand contained all the options generally inherent in the institutional system of publicity (celebrities, a social life, the circulation of information, fashion, politics, art, etc.) and on the other hand the corrupting factors of first-level publicity were no longer present (power, money, public access). In the 1980s experimental filmmaking, contemporary music, theater, underground pop music, and visual art were in an intensive interaction.²⁵

Kassák Színház / Squat Theater / Péter Halász

Among a few others the most outstanding theater community was the Kassák Színház (Kassák Community Centre) founded in 1969, but the theater group was often called after the actor, director, and writer Péter Halász (b. 1943 Budapest).

In 1972, following an overall ban on public performances, the group began to play in the flat Peter Halász shared with his grandmother at 20 Dohány street in Budapest.

The group included István Bálint, Péter Breznyik, Éva Buchmüller, Anna Koós and others, and its concept was that of performance as a form of life, with simple but strong visuals. The authorities couldn't tolerate Kassák Színház, and in 1976 they forced the whole group to emigrate. In 1977 they ended up in New York where they opened the Squat Theater in 23rd Street, which lasted for about eight years and became a major presence within the contemporary art world of downtown New York, through performances such as *Pig, Child, Fire* 1977, *Andy Warhol's Last Love* 1978, the Obie Award-winning play *Mr. Dead and Mrs. Free* 1981, *Dreamland Burns* 1986 and *L-Train to Eldorado* 1989.²⁶

From 1992 on Péter Halász has regularly worked in Budapest, and recently he has been running a small theater (Városi Színház / City Theater) in Budapest.

It's also important to mention contemporary music, promoted and presented by young composers

such as Zoltán Jeney, László Vidovszky, László Sáry, and András Wilhelm at the Új Zenei Stúdió (Studio for New Music), and the famous ensemble 180 csoport (group 180), which interprets contemporary music under the leadership of Tibor Szemző.

Since even pop and rock music was under state control, new movements couldn't achieve much publicity. The main underground groups were: Kex, Bizottság, Trabant, Balaton, Európa Kiadó, Neurotic.

4.10

There have been several institutions, of which I picked four, that played an important role during the last two decades.

Liget Galéria

Run by the artist Tibor Várnagy since 1983, this tiny gallery has an excellent international record. In the last twenty years it not only provided exhibition space but also initiated and produced a series of important events. Artists around the gallery represented the new wave of photography for those who the technical played a secondary role, which caused disturbance among the established community of photographers. Liget Gallery still showcases non-commercial projects and emerging artists.²⁷

Knoll Galéria

In 1988 Hans Knoll, a Vienna-based gallerist started to work with Hungarian artists and decided to open a new venue in Eastern Europe. Being actively involved in most of the Central and Eastern European countries he opened the new venue in Budapest in 1989 with an exhibition of Joseph Kosuth, and since that time Hans Knoll has not only organized solo and group shows for international and Hungarian artists but produced several publications, and initiated different forms of co-operation, from curatorial education forums to open studio programmes²⁸ and round-tables.

FKSE (Studio of the Young Artists Association)

Founded in 1958 as the official association of young artists, since 1990 it has become an agency-type institution, which is active nationally and has built a lot of international contacts, initiated studio

programmes, residencies too. It has become a launch-pad for many young artists, curators, and writers under the age of 35. The association organizes international exchanges and curates group-shows annually inviting guest curators. It runs a small space, Studio Gallery, which for many emerging artists provides a place for their first solo exhibitions and since 1991 they have organised a week of one-day exhibitions called *Gallery by Night*, together with invited curators.

Intermedia Faculty at the Hungarian Academy of Fine Arts, Budapest²⁹

This new department at the 150-year-old art academy (in 2000 it gained university status and is now called the University of Fine Arts) was established right after the political changes in 1990, beside the traditional departments of sculpture, painting, graphic art, etc. The Intermedia Faculty has a strong theoretical approach focusing on visual studies, new media and science and was the first programme in a Hungarian art institution working in parallel with similar western programmes (ZKM, Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie, Karlsruhe; KHM, Kunsthochschule für Medien, Cologne) and based on the new, post-Cold War, media-conscious set-up where the experience of the unofficial art-Fluxus-radical avant-garde tradition confronts infotainment. Intermedia offers a five-year course in digital media, both practical and theoretical, but also in 'classical' media (drawing, photography, film, video). A majority of its graduate students are very active in the young arts scene and definitely not only in the field of digital arts. Concerning its influence we can perhaps say that Intermedia is not just a new faculty of the old Academy, but possibly a new artistic paradigm for a new global situation.

4.11

János Sugár

(b. 1958 Budapest. Lives and works in Budapest.)

fig. 127

Sugár studied in the Department of Sculpture at the Hungarian Academy of Fine Arts in Budapest (1979–84) and worked with the Indigo group, between 1980–6. His work includes installations, performances, as well as film and video. He has been teaching art and media theory in the Intermedia Department of the Hungarian Academy of Fine Arts since 1990, and

has exhibited widely throughout Europe including *Documenta 9*, Kassel 1992, *Manifesta 1*, Rotterdam 1996. He completed an Artslink residency at the Cleveland Institute of Art in 1994, and fellowships at Experimental Intermedia, New York (1988 and 1999). His films were screened at the Anthology Film Archive in New York in 1998.

Among Sugár's early pieces was the large installation *Exhibition Set* in 1985, which was also the set for a film he made (*Persian Walk* 1985); and a theatrical performance in which two opera singers sang about video-technology (*Immortal Culprits* 1988). He also ran a performance series between 1984 and 1988 entitled *Fast Culture* with a 'punk' philosopher, Talán Sebeö, and a writer friend P. Lekov (Ferenc Gerlóczy). Once a year, just the three of them would sit and talk freely on a small makeshift stage at the Kossuth Club 30 as they would among themselves. The situation aimed at shifting the spontaneity of small talk and kitchen conversations developing at parties with all kinds of interesting things coming up in the form of a public presentation. Sugár made specific works as backdrops to fit the talks.

Between 1998 and 2000 he made a series of exhibitions called *General Reminder* with Yuri Leiderman (Ludwig Múzeum Budapest — Museum of Contemporary Art, Budapest; Galeria Wyspa, Gdansk; Galerija Miroslav Kraljević, Zagreb; TV Gallery, Moscow).

4.12

Tamás Komoróczy

(b. 1963 Békéscsaba. Lives and works in Budapest and Berlin.)

fig. 185

Komoróczy studied painting at the Hungarian Academy of Fine Arts in Budapest and was a member of the **Újlak group**, (Újlak csoport, 1989–96), the most important group formation of the late 1980s, in which young visual artists (Tamas Komoróczy, Kálmán Ádám, Zoltán Ádám, Gábor Farkas, András Ravasz, Péter Szarka and István Szil) worked in a very intensive atmosphere together. They staged their events in squatted places, in the spirit of intimate, Arte Povera-type conceptualism. They started in an abandoned cinema called Újlak, where they ran a gallery programme with one-night exhibitions. When they had to give this venue up in 1990 they moved to a small factory-type loft and continued their activities

inviting international artists and publishing catalogues. When they had to move yet again they obtained a small gallery space. U.F.F gallery which worked well for a while but finally closed down in 2000.

Tamás Komoróczy has made a sensitive, intellectual but very diverse and energetic body of work and activity. Early in his career he mainly made installation art, and from the 1990s he became involved in the Budapest techno scene, using computer technology and working with digital video. He tends to present an absurd narrativity in his video works and has a strong, intensive graphic language, which translates into making rolls of digital prints and using them as wallpaper. In 2001, together with Antal Lakner, he represented Hungary at the 48th Venice Biennale with the show 'Social Intercourse'.

4.13

Róza El-Hassan

(b. 1966 Budapest. Lives and works in Budapest.)

fig. 181

El-Hassan studied sculpting and got her degree in the years of political change in 1989–90. Her main characteristic is to connect conceptual, scientific and political content to such classically sensitive art forms as sculpture and drawing. Early in her career she concentrated on creating minimalist objects. *Gleaming Fruits* 1996 is one of her metaphorical works, where she placed an electric lightbulb inside a pear, a continuation of her questioning the relationship between natural and artificial with strong references to painting and still-lives. In connection to what Peter Weibel coined as 'Kontext Kunst', she started to focus more on physical and social situations and the relationship between art, politics and the economy as well as the conditions underlying the system by which art operates. In the billboard project of the Secession in Vienna with a text that reads: 'Milica Tomić and Róza El-Hassan driving in a Porsche and thinking about overpopulation.' The project has been part of a series by *EXTRA-TERRITORIA* that begun with the production of a T-shirt and a text printed on it, 'I am Overpopulation', and was founded by Róza El-Hassan together with Milica Tomić and Branimir Stojanović in 1999 at Café Karmin in Belgrade as a platform for dialogues between the participating artists.

She was the first Hungarian participant in Aperto at the 45th Venice Biennale in 1993. She took

part in *Manifesta I* in Rotterdam (1996) and was one of the artists representing Hungary at the 47th Venice Biennale (1997) in the Hungarian Pavilion.

4.14

Attila Csörgő

(b. 1965 Budapest. Lives and works in Budapest.)

fig. 172

Csörgő studied at the Hungarian Academy of Fine Arts in Budapest and spent one year at the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam in 1993. His works including kinetic sculptures, cameras and photographic series embody transitive/contingent states and involve technology that challenges the viewer's senses and ways of seeing, thus let him enter the realms inherent in permutable structures and perceptual states. One of his early pieces, *The Maelström Project* 1995, was a rotating small barrel-like container with 45 litres of motor oil. The black liquid forms a reflective surface that curves into a parabola as a result of the spinning motion and from the moment the motors are switched on the surface keeps changing with the curve of the parabola becoming deeper.

In 1999 he participated in a group show *Tackling Techné* at the Hungarian Pavilion at the 48th Venice Biennale.

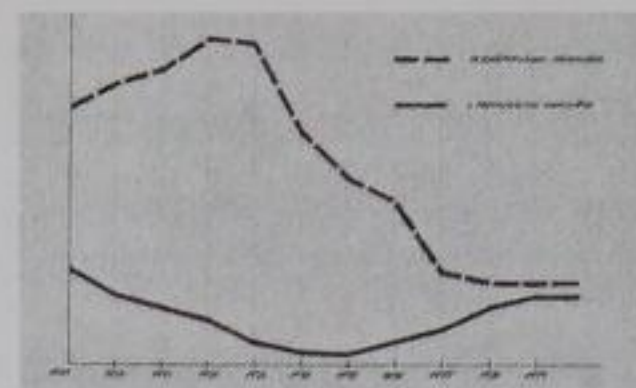
- 1 A long time ago somebody asked the question: 'If a tree falls in a forest, and nobody is there, does it still make a sound?' The problem is, do things happen the same way when nobody can watch them, and can we ever find out? And what if it's not possible to watch them?
Schrödinger's Cat: a cat is placed in a box, together with a radioactive atom. If the atom decays, and the Geiger-counter detects an alpha particle, the hammer hits a flask of prussic acid (HCN), killing the cat. The paradox lies in the clever coupling of quantum and classical domains. Before the observer opens the box, the cat's fate is tied to the wave function of the atom, which is itself in a superposition of decayed and undecayed states. Thus, said Schrödinger, the cat must itself be in a superposition of dead and alive states before the observer opens the box, 'observes' the cat, and 'collapses' its wave function.
- 2 J. Sugár, 'The Reinforcement of the Center', in *Mittel Europa: Artists Speak on the Arts In Central Europe, New Observations*, n° 91, September/October, 1992
- 3 A slightly different version of this can be found in J. Richardson (ed.), *Anarchitexts. Voices from the Global Digital Resistance*, Autonomedia, New York 2004
- 4 'lower east side', © by Luchezar Bojadjiyev
- 5 The *Manhattan Project* was a secret effort by the United States during World War II to develop the first nuclear

weapons, because the Nazis were rumored to be developing an atomic bomb. Its research was directed by American physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer, and overall by General Leslie R. Groves after the MAUD Committee had reported that a weapon based on nuclear fission was possible and that Nazi Germany was also investigating such weapons of its own.

- 6 In Hungary approximately 800 statues of St. Stephan, the founder of the Hungarian State, crowned in 1000, were erected in 2001.
- 7 In Hungarian: *támogatás* (support), *tűrés* (tolerance), *tiltás* (banning).
- 8 A sociological notion and common term used to denote the cultural underground in repressive societies.
- 9 I guess Hungary is not the only country within the former Eastern Bloc where historians struggle with synthesizing the former official and unofficial histories of art in the national context.
- 10 After its ban a year later he started *MA (Today)* in 1916, which was later followed by the political and cultural magazine *DOKUMENTUM (Document)* between 1926 and 1927 and *MUNKA (Work)* between 1928 and 1939
- 11 *Partita* (1974, final print 1988), *Álommásolatok/Dream Reconstructions* (1977), *Verzió/Version* (1979, final print 1981), *Vonatút/Train Journey* (1981, final print 1988) and *Tavaszi kivégzés/Spring Execution* (1985)
- 12 'Iparterv' has been applied for a generation of artists who started their career in the 1960s. The name derived from the space, where Péter Sinkovits, a freshly graduated art historian invited eleven artists to exhibit in 1968-9. This was the assembly hall of a construction company's headquarters in the center of Budapest. The retrospective took place in the Fészek Gallery in 1988 with the title 'Hommage á Iparterv 1968/69'.
- 13 The International Parallel Union of Telecommunications (IPUT) was founded in 1968 under the codename Parallel Course/Study-Track and has functioned since then as a kind of cover-up institution for part of his activity. He established a new group in Geneva in 1976.
- 14 Before his death he worked on a feature film on Bauhaus. One strange new development in his story came to light in 2000, when the opening of Hungary's secret police files revealed that he had been spying on his closest colleagues and friends in the 1970s. Due to this the authorities could prevent Miklós Erdély and other leading representatives of Hungarian contemporary art being invited to the Venice Biennial.
- 15 'A Triptych' consisting of three three-minute tapes that expresses three different aspects of Bódy's artistic aspirations. 'Philo-Clip' is inspired by *De Occulta Philosophia*, a magic manual written by Agrippa von Nettesheim, the 15th-century occult adept. Bódy depicts an outline of the relations of the human body which is combined with elliptical light signals that pulsate and are driven by synthetic bursts of sound. A figure appears. The alchemist, who was once von Nettesheim, now finds his expression in and through Bódy. 'Mytho-Clip' — *Dancing Eurynome* 1983. 'Mytho-Clip' is dedicated to the Greek Goddess Eurynome, the child of Oceanus and Tethys. She was the mother of the Graces and of the rivergod

Aesopus. Eurynome dances on water — and to the music of 'der Plan'. Astrological symbols (an egg, a bird and the suchlike) are added to the image of her mythical dance. In 'Mytho-Clip' (as in the other two clips), Bódy exploits video's considerable potential to transform the image. 'Lyric-Clip — Walzer'. There is also dancing in this tape but this time it's about the lyric dance of youth and is depicted by Bódy in an unconventional way. 'Walzer' is a poem written by Novalis, the German romantic poet (1772-1801) to mark the premature death of his fiancée Sophie von Kühn. The text of Walzer is recited and appears in a spiral — the spiral of life? 'Lyric-Clip' reflects the transience of youth as borne out by the macabre, dancing skeleton that appears on screen. catalogue.montevideo.nl/art.php?id=818

- 16 In the document analysis titled *Private History* (1978, b/w, 35mm, 25 min) Bódy, together with Péter Tímár, adapted home movies made between the two World Wars in a composition Hungary.
- 17 E. Sasvári, J. Klaniczay (eds.), *Törvénytelen avantgárd. Galántai György balatonboglári kápolnaműterme 1970-1973*, Artpool-Balassi, Budapest 2003
- 18 Eleven issues were published between 1983 and 1985.
- 19 See www.artpool.hu
- 20 G. Pauer, *The Manifesto of the First PSEUDO Exhibition*, October 1970
- 21 In 1996 the C3 Center for Culture and Communication, Budapest made a virtual remake of this monumental piece.
- 22 A book about Indigo group edited and written by Sándor Hornyik is to be published this year.
- 23 *Tendencies* (1970-80) included six thematic shows in Budapest. With different art historians acting as curators it aimed to give an in-depth look into the progressive art of the 1970s. The last exhibition, *Post-Conceptual Tendencies*, was curated by László Beke.
- 24 Gábor Bora was born and studied in Budapest and moved to Sweden in 1983 where he teaches philosophy and aesthetics. In the meantime it has become The Intermedia Institute of the Hungarian Art University Budapest.
- 25 J. Sugár, *op. cit.*, p.11
- 26 See E. Buchmüller, A. Koós (eds.), *Squat Theatre*, Artists Space, New York 1996
- 27 www.c3.hu/~ligal/template.htm
- 28 He initiated 'White Flags', a mobile symposium in open studios. See *White Flags — Mobiles Symposium in offenen Ateliers. Ein Projektbericht aus Budapest*, Galeria Knoll, Budapest and Bundeskuratorin für Kunst, Vienna 1998
- 29 See intermedia.c3.hu or www.intermedia.c3.hu/theory/index.html
- 30 Kossuth Club gave space to an evening university with a series of lectures called TIT (Association of Scientific Dissemination).



From left to right and top to bottom:

- Lajos Kassák *Self-Portrait Montage* 1964
- Miklós Erdély *The Proportionment of Ideas and Their Realisation* 1979
- Tamás St. Aubyl / Szentjóbý *The Statue of Liberty's Soul* 1992
- György Jovánovics *Lying Figure* 1969
- Gyula Pauer *A Forest of Demonstrating Signs* 1978
- András Böröcz, László L. Révész *Jubilee* 1982
- János Sugár *Fastculture 84* 1984-88
- Tamás Komoróczy *Komyofej 1-7* 1997
- Róza El-Hassan *Gleaming Fruit* 1996
- Attila Csörgő *The Maelström Project* 1995

Contemporary Art in Latvia: Artists and Events since the 1960s Compiled by Solvita Krese

French Group (circa 1965)

In the mid-1960s, a group of students at the Latvian Academy of Art formed the so-called French Group, which lasted until the early 1970s. Members of the group — Imants Lancmanis, Bruno Vasiļevskis, Maija Tabaka and Juris Pudāns — rejected officially sanctioned themes of Soviet art, turning instead to the study of élite European cultural traditions as a way of opposing ideological vulgarity. A revision of the classical and modernist traditions of objectivity (*Sachlichkeit*) and surrealism is reflected in paintings by group members, some of whom were also associated with the café Kaza (The Goat), an informal gathering place for the alternative art community in the 1960s and 1970s.

Nature, Environment, Man, Riga (1984)

This was the first major exhibition of non-traditional art forms. It featured work by more than a hundred artists, but because the show's content did not meet the 'correct' ideological criteria it was shut down soon after it opened. This was one of the first exhibitions to include installation work; it also revealed new thematic directions such as ecological concerns, among other issues.

Annual Film Days and Art Days, Riga (1986–8)

These were the first manifestations in a public space that displayed a socially critical attitude (participating artists included Kristaps Ģelzis, Oļegs Tillbergs, Sarmīte Māliņa and Ojārs Pētersons). Alternative art performances and the exhibition *Children of Staburags* 1988, which took place in the underground passage of the Central Railway Terminal, presented new models for communication between artists and

viewers. The latter were no more passive observers but were actively involved in the art process in situ. The action *Cages* 1987, at Philharmonic Square carried a rather clear anti-ideological message and was stopped by the police.

Riga — Lettische Avantgarde, West Berlin (1988)

This show, organised by the Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst, was the first foreign presentation of work by younger Latvian artists. It linked their groundbreaking, iconoclastic art (installations, performance, video, documentation) with the traditions of the Latvian and European avant-garde as well as with technologies of resistance and protest.

French-Latvian Videoart Festival (1991) and **the French-Baltic Videoart Festivals** (1992–3)

These annual events promoted new video and film media on the local art scene and served as a platform for presenting experimental video art. The festivals also provided information about the international context of video art and its distribution through other media (for example, television). Featured Latvian artists included: Arvīds Alksnis, Juris Poškus, Hardijs Lediņš, Artis Dzērve, Aija Stafecka, Juris Putrāms, Indulis Gailāns, Ginta Vilsons, Anita Zabiļevska, Andris Frīdbergs and Gints Gabrāns.

The Soros Center for Contemporary Art, Riga (1993)

During its existence the SCCA — Riga presented contemporary Latvian art, gathered information about artists, created an image database, administered numerous local and international art projects, and organised several large-scale exhibitions.

In 2000, the centre was reorganised and now carries out its activities as the Latvian Center for Contemporary Art (LCCA), with a website at the address www.lcca.lv

Gallery M6 (1993–5) and Club Secret Experiment (1995–8)

These not-for-profit spaces presented ongoing, well-thought-out programmes of contemporary art exhibitions featuring the work of Latvian and foreign artists. M6 was led by Inga Šteimane (1993–4) and Helēna Demakova (1995–6). Beginning in 1995, Šteimane curated exhibitions at Secret Experiment, inviting young artists to show their work in the specific environment of a nightclub as well as hosting performances and new media events.

Open* (1995) and *Biosport* (1996) — two interdisciplinary events created by the duo **Open (Kaspars Vanags and Ilze Strazdiņa)*

These events made a very strong impact on the local scene in the way they combined aspects of a rave, a club event and an art action. In the atmospheric spaces of these projects one encountered artist-produced works and environments, as well as soundscapes and music by participating DJs. The two projects were very influential in that they developed the concept of the alternative space and initiated collaborations between sound and visual artists in Riga.

***Personal Time: Art of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania 1946–1996* at the Zachęta Gallery, Warsaw (1996)**

The Latvian segment of this exhibition and its catalogue was the first systematic attempt to conceptualise the links between modernist traditions and contemporary art practices in Latvian art.

The Internet radio *Ozone ozone.re-lab.net* was launched in 1997 by the new media laboratory **E-Lab (founded in 1996) rixc.lv**

Experiments with Internet broadcasting led to the notion of ‘acoustic space’, which is still being developed by the new media lab and associated media artists, as witnessed by conferences, presentations and the book series *Acoustic Space*. These broadcasts fostered greater exchange with the international media

community and collaborations between local sound and new media artists.

Department of Visual Communications (1997)

In 1997 the Department of Graphic Design at the Latvian Art Academy became the Department of Visual Communications. Under the guidance of Professor Aleksandrs Dembo and, especially, the current chair Ojārs Pētersons, the department has developed creative courses relating to digital technologies, interactive art, and new media. The department provides important educational and technical support for young artists. Graduates include the F5 group, Katrīna Neiburga, Krišs Salmanis, Dace Džeriņa, Anta Pence, Dita Pence and others.

Bruno Vasiļevskis

(b. 1939 Rēzekne — d. 1990 Riga)

fig. 72

In 1989, Bruno Vasiļevskis published his laconic credo ‘in art, as in science, nothing can be invented, it can only be discovered’. Vasiļevskis’s discoveries began in the early 1960s within the political and cultural isolation of the totalitarian system. He responded to the internal processes of Latvian art by rejecting not only its somewhat modernised form of socialist realism, but also the subjective expressionism and formalist effects of late modernism. Thus he was one of the first artists in Latvia to explore the new interest in the reality of experience — the ‘new figurativism’ in painting that had begun to manifest itself in the so-called free world at about the same time.

Vasiļevskis wanted to free himself from the ‘models of thinking’ that had been created before him and which he experienced as a kind of prison in his early development. Liberation, he said, meant ‘establishing contact with objective reality, without a borrowed view’. There was also an ethical motivation for this contact with factual reality, one that is quite understandable given the mendacious culture of totalitarianism. However, Vasiļevskis was never a preacher or political commentator. The message of the various objects in his paintings (a table top, a wall, a book, the green of an outdoor scene) was not explicit, and contemporary references in his work (a Soviet passport, for example), were secondary aspects. For him, contact with objective reality was

most important on a general conceptual level. It involved an examination of the relationship between the visual data of reality and painting, the formation of aspects of reality and their organisation through *a priori* concepts like those Kant describes. This he did in part by employing classic representational painting techniques (the use of geometry as the basis for the initial drawing or cartoon, centralised perspective, variations in the tonal gradation of colour as a way of modeling sculptural contours according to the lighting). Thus Vasiļevskis made painting the site of a confrontation between his inner world and sensual reality. While rejecting the discoveries of Cézanne and his modernist followers and submersing himself within the sphere of his own challenges Vasiļevskis nevertheless retained Cézanne's absolutist obsession with harmonising an ideal mind-created world with visual 'truth'. The achieved sculptural clarity merges with the relief of shadows and reflections governed by geometry. Apparent materiality is transformed into abstract light and space, and this, after all, was what Vasiļevskis considered his primary subject.

Eduards Kļaviņš

Miervaldis Polis

(b. 1948 Riga. Lives and works in Riga.)

fig. 85

For the past three decades Miervaldis Polis has preserved a solitary but well-received élitist image on the Latvian art scene. His painting cycles, performances, and provocative theoretical pronouncements have already become part of Latvia's contemporary art tradition. Perhaps the dominant feature of Polis's virtuoso paintings and performances could be described as his revisionist approach to the cultural context, whether situated in the past or the present. As the artist himself has said, his works belong to 'post-traditional' art.

In the early 1970s, together with Līga Purmale, Polis painted a series of photorealistic works. However, in contrast to photorealism's characteristic urban motifs Polis was fascinated by the possibility of depicting and enlarging small objects, the 'manifestations of an enclosed micro-world'. Photographic precision and shifts in scale can also be found in his later surreal series of paintings *Pages from a Book on Colossi Island*, where the artist and his friend are depicted wandering among colossal monuments that are actually gigantic finger joints. A similar

aesthetic replacement occurs in the earlier series *Illusions on the Pages of a Book on Venice*, where the artist inserts his own self-portrait into reproductions of Venetian scenes. Polis also employed such shifts as travel through time and play with cultural contexts in later works.

In the second half of the 1970s, in search of a new artistic language and under the influence of Bruno Vasiļevskis, Polis began studying painting techniques used by the Old Masters for precise depiction as well as optical effects. These historical investigations, combined with a study of photographic depiction, resulted in series of works in a *trompe l'oeil* style — painted photographs and reproductions of Old Masters with the insertion of his own self-portrait. Claiming that his works are tools for self-exploration, Polis usually underscores a certain degree of attachment to the objects he paints, whether staged portraits, photographs of his mother, dedications to a particular painter or his work (e.g. *Leonardo da Vinci's Portrait of a Musician with a Palette* 1992). Similarly, the construction of his own public image becomes for him an eclectic play with history in which Polis in his paintings identifies himself as both a Renaissance painter and a nobleman. Similarly, Polis's performances are always theoretically well defined. His first performance actions took place in 1986, when he founded Egocentrs, a one-man institute for research into the ego and related issues. The main protagonist in his performances was the artist's Alter-Ego (for a long time known as 'The Bronze Man'). On several occasions from 1987 to 1992, the Bronze Man intervened in the daily life of Riga with such actions as the Bronze Man's march through the city; *Latvian Gold*, which involved collective begging by the Bronze Men (in collaboration with the artists' group LPSR-Z); *Sellers of Sunflower Seeds* (with artist Vilnis Zābers); and the *Bronze Monument*. These actions made ironic reference to the changes taking place in Latvian society during the years of transition, including Soviet customs, the emergence of new state values and the dismantling of monuments from the Soviet regime. In 1999, the Bronze Man, together with the White Man (Finnish artist Roi Vaara), entered the international scene with the establishment of the International Association of Phantoms. Alongside the institutionalisation that took place in the 1990s, the artist's actions continued with staged self-focused events in gallery spaces, for example, *The Memorial Room of Miervaldis Polis*.

The decade was also marked by a new concept in the artist's public image, a notion of 'renewed nobility' that encompasses the ethical codes of the nineteenth century and contemporary noblemen. Polis's current painting practice reinforces his public image as a member of the 'renewed nobility'.

Māra Traumane

Translated by Andris Mellakauls

Oļegs Tillbergs

(b. 1956 Saulkrasti. Lives and works in Riga.)

fig. 176

Oļegs Tillbergs began exhibiting his work in the second half of the 1980s when censorship of the arts was finally abandoned in Soviet Latvia.

Even in his first installations he displayed a degree of excellence that remained constant in the years that followed. His work is known for the poetry he achieves through the careful arrangement of materials. What is important for Tillbergs in choosing his materials, including his ready-made objects, is not only such physical properties as texture, character and colour but even more the resonances they possess. These resonances contain a social message that corresponds with the moods and problems that affect society in both Latvia and the world at large. Among the materials Tillbergs has employed in his work are a Soviet MIG 27 fighter jet, which he displayed upside down with bees in the cockpit; a five-metre-long whale bone; a rescue boat; and a thousand pairs of Soviet army boots. The artist strives for highly charged emotion-laden images that unsophisticated viewers often interpret, mistakenly, as symbols of aggression.

When creating new works he frequently returns to the same or similar materials so as to generate associations. For a very long time he was interested in the flow of white drapery; then came a period characterised by huge paintings (up to four hundred square metres in size) created using motor oil. He has made use of a range of airplane parts — engines, fuselages, wings, cockpits and even entire planes. Although Tillbergs's work echoes that of other well-known artists (for example, Joseph Beuys and Jannis Kounellis), it differs from them in its direct, realistic and unobscured message, which at the same time remains polyphonically metaphorical. His solo exhibitions (*Look into My Eyes* in 1995 at the Museum of Art Arsenāls in Riga, and *Dream of a Boy in a Falling Airplane* in 1996 in Berlin at the ifa-Galerie

Friedrichstrasse) were marked by an interest in the human condition, including the final meta-story, death. While he believes in the power of fiction in the formation of any relationship, he finds it equally important to de-mystify conditions and situations.

Helēna Demakova

Translated by Andris Mellakauls

Aija Zariņa

(b. 1954 Sauka Village. Lives and works in Riga.)

fig. 182

Painter Aija Zariņa arrived on the art scene in the early 1980s, a time that signalled the beginning of a much-needed rejuvenation of the Latvian art scene. It was then that a whole generation of young and talented artists appeared, fresh out of the Academy of Art, who very soon became synonymous with a style of artistic thought and self-expression that was free from the canon of the national painting tradition.

Zariņa's artistic non-conformity has always been rooted not so much in social protest as in humanist pathos. For a narrow-minded, puritanical sector of society, stupefied by a long-bankrupt ideology, her work was initially felt to be penetrating and shocking: it reminded viewers of such forgotten concepts as the individual in his or her physical and spiritual being, the subconscious, sexuality, and the great existential triad birth-life(love)-death. Zariņa confronted society with the rejected images of its collective conscience, often blending them with abstract mythological and cultural historical allusions (with variations on such themes as the rape of Europa, Carmen and centaurs). In her work, she dared to espouse the conviction that art provides a space for the artist's free self-expression. Even as late as the mid-1980s, selection committees at the Artists' Union and Ministry of Culture often rejected the paintings she submitted for exhibitions.

From the outset, Zariņa's artistic style diverged from the classical canon of painting, instead developing its own remarkable purpose and logic. Her style makes easily recognisable reference to such European avant-garde masters as Paul Klee, Pablo Picasso, Joan Miró, Kasimir Malevich and others. Even her early works — lapidary decorative still lifes and landscapes — were marked by an interest in the relationships between plane and space, pure local colours, and refined childish shapes and lines. In the mid-1980s her art acquired a new vision with large-scale figurative works initially realised, on a single

plane (mostly on cardboard) and then, later, shaped at an angle of ninety degrees (her solo exhibition at the Museum of Art Arsenāls in 1989 saw the floor of the museum being painted for the first time), until finally all three spatial dimensions came into play. The works of this period were dominated by an abstract figuration and a well-defined dynamic composition featuring vibrant contrasts of colour; these possessed a loud and aggressive decorativeness, at the same time as an extraordinary tense emotionality that was determined by the size of the images and their original, individual semiotics. A characteristic feature of Zariņa's art is her use of various symbolic and abstract images (angels, centaurs, birds, Madonna heads, signs of eternity, etc.) during specific periods. These take the form of well-defined series, appearing as grotesque exaggerations that are at the same time poetically fragile, sensitive and spiritual. Since 1987, in addition to painting, she has been making objects (mainly from wood) for various indoor and open-air exhibitions. These objects possess hypertrophied and rough forms as well as expressive imagery. The 1990s saw a new tendency in Zariņa's works. If her earlier works had tended to invade the space with their size, they now became quieter and more fragile, with a more restrained expressiveness; lighter and more transparent, these pieces entered the space more organically as if melting into their surroundings.

Antra Kļaviņa

Translated by Andris Mellakauls

Workshop for the Restoration of Non-Existent Feelings (1982–9)

fig. 122

'Somewhere between Zen Buddhism and Californian hi-tech philosophy' is one way of describing the Workshop for the Restoration of Non-Existent Feelings (known by its Latvian abbreviation, NSRD), an influential group whose work in the 1980s hovered between happenings, music performance, actions, video art, poetry and the appropriation of computer effects. The group's founders Hardijs Lediņš (b. 1955) and Juris Boiko (b. 1954) had no art academy education, with the former being trained as an architect and the latter becoming a poet and graphic designer. They have explained their multifaceted production — happenings and actions, music recordings and film — using such descriptions as 'approximate art', 'having human qualities rather than technological calculations',

ambience and postmodernism interpreted as a 'double code' and 'a combination of modern technologies with something else.'

In an imaginary, ironic court trial against the NSRD, Lediņš confessed to three crimes: organising discotheques, creating certain musical compositions, and conducting various actions. In the second half of the 1970s during the prehistory of NSRD, Lediņš and Boiko produced a number of thematic musical events that introduced the public to such contemporary music as the compositions of Cage, Stockhausen, Webern, New Age music, and, later, the German new wave. Their discotheques were complemented by lectures, presentations and slide shows. These activities reached their climax in 1977 with the Riga Avant-Garde Music Festival, which scandalised Communist Party officials. The end of the 1970s also witnessed the first experimental music recordings by Lediņš and Boiko themselves. The name NSRD was invented in 1982 as an entity to which the artists' musical compositions could be attributed. NSRD actions never carried any direct socio-critical message; moreover, the group's deliberate outsider position and subjective transformation of reality distanced them from anti-regime pronouncements. The NSRD circle also included, at various times, five or six other participants — musicians, architects, and artists. Initially, the actions carried out by the group were attempts to 'seek in the surrounding reality ideas found in music'.

By 1988, the group had carried out more than twenty time-based actions (some of them annual events) in both urban and rural settings. As a rule these included written, audio, or video documentation and could be described as 'happenings'. Annual painting actions took place along transportation routes (on highways, at railroad stations, on an airfield), and included *Travel to Italy with a Stop in Sweden on the Way*, *Walks to Bolderāja*. Such actions touched on the themes of contemplation, the differentiation of space and ecological thinking. NSRD's yearly *Walks to Bolderāja* (1980–7) became legendary. The walk, which followed the railway line to Riga's remote seaside district, included a number of ritualistic rules: for example, the route had to pass through different zones in the city; there had to be an alternation between light and darkness; the journey had to be documented; each walk had to take place in a different month. In the performance *Binocular Dance Classes* and the resulting video, Lediņš and Boiko taught conceptual eye dances to

the audience, encouraging conscious 'eye dancing' instead of just blinking.

Throughout the 1980s, the NSRD continued to record alternative music; experiments with computer-generated sound gave rise to the idea of 'approximation'. Lediņš, who was a recognised critic in art, music and architecture, influenced the group with his ideas about flexible, ambient space and postmodernist thinking. In 1987, the *Exhibition of Approximate Art* presented significant investigations into multimedia and ways of perceiving ambient space. The event brought together environmental installations, live performances, jazz and electronic music events, video screenings and broadcasts, and computer performances, all under the rubric of 'actions without definite borders'. This was the first project in which the NSRD identified itself as an art group. The following year, the NSRD participated in an international *Telephone Concert* in which sounds from Riga, San Francisco, Damascus, Moscow and other places, were transmitted through telephone lines. The NSRD dissolved itself in 1989, soon after the exhibition *Riga — Lettische Avantgarde*, a decision that can be viewed as yet another refusal to submit to curatorial requirements or to fit neatly into the visual art context: 'They [the curators] took it [the activities of NSRD] for the phenomenon of Latvian art, but it was meant neither as art nor as phenomenon.'

Māra Traumane

Translated by Andris Mellakauls

Famous Five (F5) (1998 onwards)

Ieva Rubeze (b. 1977 Liepaja. Lives and works in Riga.), **Līga Marcinkeviča** (b. 1975 Saldus. Lives and works in Riga.), **Mārtiņš Ratniks** (b. 1975 Riga. Lives and works in Riga.), **Ervins Broks**, (b. 1975 Riga. Lives and works in Riga.) **Renārs Krūmiņš**, (b. 1974 Riga. Lives and works in Riga. Participant of F5 until 2001.)

fig. 222

The young artists' group the Famous Five (F5) appeared quite suddenly on the Latvian art scene in 1998. Their very first group exhibition, *Fat* 1999, was seen as heralding a new generation of artists, mostly owing to their use of new technologies (digital video and computer animation), but also because of their play with diverse forms of contemporary aesthetics, the use of a single group label for their activities, and their work in the club-culture environment.

The group was formed, and its name coined, while the artists were taking part in the Polar Circuit workshops in Tornio, Finland, where students from the visual communications department of the Latvian Art Academy had unlimited access to digital video cameras and editing software for the first time. Their first videos were experiments with various film techniques: length of exposure, the insertion of digital animation, a variety of editing approaches, sampling and so on. On their return to Riga as F5, they became part of the city's developing club, sound art and new media environment. VJ-ing was still a new phenomenon, and there were numerous electronic music events and presentations that required the kind of intense, stylish, and ever-changing environment that could be created with projections and television screens that looped video images. The samples used for the popular and abstract imagery in F5's video loops were often taken from the Internet or software programmes which were then digitally stylised, animated, remixed and adapted for visual and music performance. The members of F5 were among the first Latvian visual artists to work in this now common field.

The visual communications department, along with its chair, Ojārs Pētersons, and the new media laboratory E-Lab, provided the artists' main support structure. F5's activities may be viewed as a continuation of the type of cross-disciplinary collaboration between musicians and artists which were initiated in the mid-1990s with the actions of the art team Open and, later, in the Internet broadcasting conducted by E-Lab. The concept of a free, alternative, creative and informal space for participation was crucial for all these activities.

The exhibition *Fat* was the first presentation by F5 artists (albeit separately) in a fine arts context. *Fat*, along with subsequent exhibitions (*Loop 2000*, *Contemporary Utopia* and *Pop-puve 2001*), reflected the individual creative interests of these 'lyrical technocrats': the surreal, poetic films of Ieva Rubeze; the provocative investigation of real-life issues in the films of Līga Marcinkeviča; the structural and ironic technical experiments of Ervins Broks; and the conceptual aesthetic videos of Renārs Krūmiņš. The work of Mārtiņš Ratniks in F5 and E-Lab (his work as a DJ and VJ, his organisation of cross-disciplinary events) has been marked by engagement in the electronic music and urban subculture; he is also involved in creative graphic design and digital animation. Since 2000, the number of F5 members

has fluctuated; currently, the core of the group are Ieva Rubeze, Mārtiņš Ratniks and Līga Marcinkeviča. In 2002, F5 took part in the Bienal de São Paulo and the Venice Biennale in 2005.

Māra Traumane

Translated by Andris Mellakauls

RIXC

(est.1996)

fig. 196

The recently founded RIXC Centre for New Media Culture in Riga is the joint effort of a number of independent local cultural groups working in the fields of new media, art, film, music, youth culture and social development. The founders of RIXC are E-Lab Electronic Arts and Media Centre (rixc.lv), the Locomotive film studio (www.karosta.org), and the Baltic Centre, an organisation devoted to education and social development. Other members and partners include artists groups: SVAIGS 99%, Bio.codes, DJS AG & Raitis, Varka Crew, F5, Open, Clausthome, Orbita, and K@2.

The aim of the centre is to bridge the gap between high and popular cultures, as well as the divisions between various subcultures (youth, minorities, etc.). RIXC seeks to be a meeting place for different cultures on both a local and international level.

The centre's main areas of activity include:

- organising public events (festivals, workshops, performances, club events, etc.)
- the media lab, which provides a production space where different artistic disciplines can meet and collaborate (video, film, audio, cd-rom and web design, electronic music)
- training programmes specially geared toward particular target groups (artists, young people, minority and local ethnic groups, administrators and managers of media centres, etc.)
- education and social programmes
- research into new media and culture, particularly streaming media (the development of an acoustic space research programme).

RIXC is a member of the Network Interface for Cultural Exchange (NICE, nice.x-i.net), a Nordic-

Baltic-Northeast European network for small-scale innovative initiatives in the field of new media culture. The centre also takes part in other international and cross-disciplinary networks, collaborative projects and mailing lists in the field of new media culture in Europe, Canada, and elsewhere.

Māra Traumane

Translated by Andris Mellakauls

Gints Gabrāns

(b. 1970 Valmiera. Lives and works in Riga.)

fig. 180

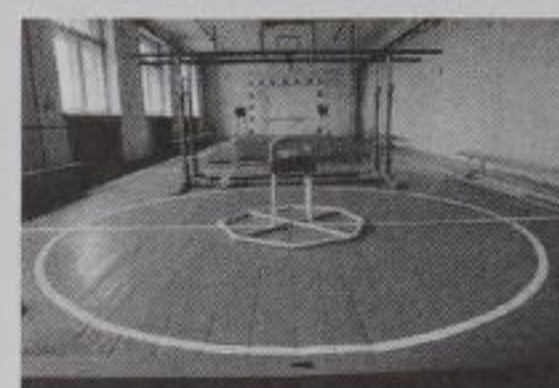
Gints Gabrāns belongs to the generation of artists who appeared on the art scene in the mid-1990s questioning fundamental ideas in contemporary art — its institutionalisation, notions of correctness, the gap between art and society and the consumption of the art object. Alongside other artists of his generation, Gabrāns presented provocative and often shocking installations of a neo-conceptual nature that trapped the viewer in programmatic statements and decision-making situations. His early works — such as the electronic text *Art is in Fashion Again* 1993 and the installations *Art of the Human Factor is not Meant for Eating* 1994, *Works Made in a Well-Known Manner* 1994, *Smoking/No Smoking* 1994, and *Knife to Cut Your Arse With* 1995 — used devices of restriction, contradiction and danger as a way of provoking the viewer and working against the sterility of the gallery space. In 1996, in the two-day cross-disciplinary action *Biosport*, he created a colourful sports field environment that corresponded to the healthy and pleasant-living mood of the event. In 1997–8, he used the formats of the questionnaire and database to create the website for a fictitious religious sect called the Spheroid Parish, which after receiving viewers' data would indicate the spatial and temporal distance to their 'Divine Birth Sphere'. He had previously used the questionnaire and opinion poll formats in *Stairway to Heaven*, in which the viewer/participant was asked to respond to an absurd, anecdotal story by following the instructions contained in the questionnaire.

In his most recent work, Gabrāns often alludes to the social conditioning of the individual and plays with stereotypes promulgated by society and the media. In comparison with his earlier work, exhibition spaces are used in an instrumental way, as promotional vehicles for the continuation of the artist's project. One of these long-term projects, *Riga*

Dating Agency (developed with Monika Pormale), incorporated real-life action in international exhibition spaces. Individuals who wished to find a partner from a foreign country were asked to submit their personal data. Their portraits, taken in special photo sessions, were later exhibited in European art galleries along with the standardised data submitted by them. Another long-term project, *Starix*, which resulted in a film that depicts the media-generated transformation of a Riga beggar into a popular star, lasted from 2001, when it was initiated as a reality show, to 2005, when the project was presented as a video installation at the 26th Bienal de São Paulo. Other recent work, such as *Imploding Agents* 2004 and *Apparent/Invisible* 2005, can be seen as a search for the relevant function of art in the reality of contemporary society.

Gints Gabrāns received the Baltic Hansabank Art Award in 2005 for his works of 2004 — *Starix* and *Imploding Agents*.

Andris Mellakauls



From left to right and top to bottom:

Bruno Vasiļevskis *Still Life* 1973

Miervaldis Polis page from the book *Island of Colossi* 1975

Oļegs Tillbergs *Look into my Eyes* 1996

Aija Zariņa *Sign* 1996

Workshop for the Restoration of Non-Existent Feelings

Walk to Bolderaja 1982–7

Famous Five Artists' Group *Bloody TV* 2000

RIXC *Media Culture in Riga* 1996

Gints Gabrāns *Untitled (Biosport)* 1996

Lithuania

Compiled by Elona Lubytė

1940-56 (Period of) Restricted Freedom

- 1940 Lithuania is incorporated into the USSR. The mechanism of arts management and control is centralised. Branches of the Artists', Composers' and Writers' Unions, monitored from Moscow, are established in Vilnius. Soviet Lithuanian Artists' Union mandates socialist realism as the only creative method.
- 1941 After the invasion of the country by German forces Nazi authorities officially limit the activity of cultural institutions, art and education. Modernist trends in art are declared to be 'degenerate' and are outlawed.
- 1943 The exhibition *Red Terror* is held at the Vilnius Art Museum.
- 1944 With the front line approaching, 70,000 Lithuanians retreat to the West. The art community disperses.
- 1946 During a conference held at the Vilnius Art Institute (now known as the Academy of Fine Arts) the Artists' Union discusses the struggle against formalism, 'kowtowing' to Western bourgeois art and expressions of cosmopolitanism in artists' work. The work of M. K. Čiurlionis and the pre-war modernist 'Ars' group is criticised.
- art (thematic painting in an 'austere style', monumental sculpture, etc.) and semi-official movement of modern art (shown in non-representational spaces, e.g. libraries, publishing houses, theaters, etc.).
- 1958 In the Palanga artists' colony, Vytautas Povilaitis paints the first post-war abstraction in Lithuania.
- 1960 Opening of Neringa, the first functionalist café. Designed by the architects Algimantas and Vytautas Nasvytis, Neringa becomes a meeting place for artists and intellectuals. First assemblages produced by Vincas Kisarauskas.
- 1962 Musicologist Vytautas Landsbergis corresponds with the leader of the Fluxus movement George Maciunas, who sends Fluxus boxes and records of avant-garde music to Lithuania.
- 1966 Exhibition of Valentinas Antanavičius's surrealist paintings in the Republican Library in Vilnius.
- 1967 Lionginas Sepetys, the Minister of Culture of the LSSR, writes *An Outline of Modernism*.
- 1968 Art Exhibition Palace (AEP) — designed by Vytautas Čekanauskas — opens in Vilnius. Exhibitions of officially 'out of favour' artists commence at the house of Judita and Vytautas Serys in Vilnius. The 1st Biennale of Baltic painting opens at AEP. Exhibition of Kaze Zimblyte's abstract paintings and collages at the Vaga publishing house is closed down. A constructivist, welded brass sculpture, made by Vladas Vildžiūnas is reluctantly installed by the new M. K. Čiurlionis' Gallery in Kaunas.

1956-70 Thaw

- 1956 Twentieth Congress of the CPSU. Beginning of the 'thaw'. Two main artistic tendencies: official

1970-88 Union Between Official and Innovative

- 1971 Vildžiūnas corresponds with the major modernist figure of Lithuanian-origin, Jacques Lipchitz. Viacheslav Ganelin's jazz trio (Ganelin, Vladimir Tarasov, Vladimir Chekasin) is formed. Their jazz concerts take place at Neringa café. Production of the rock opera *Jesus Christ Superstar* by students from the Faculty of Architecture at the Vilnius Institute of Civil Engineering.
- 1972 Marija Rožanskaitė creates a pop art composition, *1941*, devoted to mass deportations. First samizdat reviews about the works of semi-official artists written by the art critic Alfonsas Andriuškevičius are disseminated.
- 1973 First group exhibition of paintings by Algimantas Kuras, Arvydas Šaltenis, Algimantas Švėgžda, Kostas Dereškevičius and Algirdas Taurinskas in the Artists' Union showroom in Vilnius introduces a new expressionistic style.
- 1975 Happenings by Robertas Antinis are staged at the first gathering of young artists in Birštonas.
- 1976 First exhibition of abstract paintings by the architect Eugenijus Antanas Cukermanas is held at the Artists' Union in Vilnius.
- 1977 On the initiative of the Artists' Union and the city of Klaipėda, summer symposiums on granite sculpture are held. The works created present a large variety of styles ranging from symbolic realism to minimalist abstraction (Mindaugas Navakas, Vladas Urbanavičius).
- 1978 First open-air installations are set-up by Zimblyte, Mazuras and Gediminas Karalius in the Vildžiūnas' house at Jeruzale gardens, Vilnius.
- 1979 1st Triennale of Young Baltic Artists is held at AEP. Moscow conceptualist Ilya Kabakov works together with Lithuanian artists in the Palanga artists' colony.
- 1980 The new generation, Vytautas Balcytis, Remigijus Pačėsa, Alfonsas Budvytis and Algirdas Šeškus, participate in the exhibition of young

photographers. Photographers Gintautas Trimakas and Alvydas Lukys start their creative work as part of the Photographers' Club at the Vilnius Institute of Civil Engineering.

- 1985 The frescos made by Petras Repšys on subjects of Lithuanian mythology at the Vilnius University Centre for Lithuanian Studies provoke a discussion on Lithuanian national identity. Exhibitions of surrealist paintings by Šarūnas Sauka and Algimantas Skačkauskas in the Republican Library are closed down. Exhibition of zincographic montage projects *Vilnius Notebook* by Navakas at the Architects' Union is closed after two hours.
- 1987 First art project in public space: exhibition of photographs by Lukys and abstract concrete sculptures by Navakas in the Alumni courtyard of Vilnius University.
- 1988 The first art gallery at the Kaunas Architects' House opens. The first curated exhibitions are held on the initiative of the Ministry of Culture: *Myth in Lithuanian Painting* (curator: Andriuškevičius), *Folk Art Tradition in 20th Century Lithuanian Art* (curator: Raminta Jurėnaitė) at AEP and *Human Signs. Sculpture, Drawings, Photographs* (curators: Rasa Andriušyte, Elona Lubyte) in Klaipėda. The group of student-actionists Žalias lapas (Green Leaf), inspired by the ideas of Joseph Beuys and Maciunas, is formed in Vilnius.

1989-2000 Impact of Freedom

- 1989 The artists' group 24 is formed. It unites artists and art critics who were in opposition to the official Soviet art. 'Post Ars' (Aleksas Andriuškevičius, Antinis, Česlovas Lukenskas) — a group of artists creating collective actions, installations and performances — start working together in Kaunas.
- 1992 The American Lithuanian artist Kęstutis Zapkus teaches at the Vilnius Art Academy. His students form the group Good Evils and have a show marking the rise of a new internationally oriented generation of artists.

- The exhibition by Good Evils is the first project of the newly established Contemporary Art Centre (former Art Exhibition Palace) in Vilnius.
- 1993** Soros Center for Contemporary Art is established in Vilnius. *Between Sculpture and Object in Lithuania*, 1st annual exhibition of SCCA (curator: Raminta Jurėnaitė) is held at the CAC. A young artist Gediminas Urbonas creates a public sculpture, *The 4 Exposures*, in the international project, Artscape Norland in Norway. A new generation of young artists enters the international art scene.
- 1994** First site-specific exhibition in Vilnius, *Sculpture in the Old Town*, is curated by the sculptor Algis Lankelis. Works by Urbonas and Sauka are exhibited at the 22nd Bienal de São Paulo.
- 1995** The site-specific project *Mundange Language* (3rd annual exhibition of SCCA) in Vilnius (curator: Algis Lankelis) initiates the movement of interventions in social space. On the initiative of the photographer Saulius Paukstys a monument to Frank Zappa is erected in Vilnius (sculptor: Konstantinas Bogdanas, architect: Valdas Ozarinskas). Navakas takes part in the 10th Gwangju Biennale. Photographer Snieguole Michelkeviciute takes part in the 4th Istanbul Biennial.
- 1997** 24 artist groups are active with some 200 artists taking part in their activities. The exhibition *Quiet Modernism in Lithuania 1962–1982* featuring the collection of non-conformist Lithuanian art is presented at CAC, curator Lubyte. Eglė Rakauskaitė takes part in the Istanbul Biennale.
- 1998** *Twilight* (5th annual exhibition of SCCA) at CAC (curators: Kęstutis Kuizinas, Deimantas Narkevičius, Evaldas Stankevičius) introduces a wide range of Lithuanian and international media art. *Cool Places*, the 7th Triennale of Contemporary Baltic Art at CAC (curator: Kęstutis Kuizinas) introduces contemporary Nordic and Baltic art. Narkevičius takes part in *Manifesta 2* in Luxembourg.
- 1999** The exhibition *Lithuanian Art 1989–1999: The Ten Years* at CAC, (curators: Kęstutis Kuizinas, Deimantas Narkevičius, Evaldas Stankevičius, Jonas Valatkevičius, Raimundas Malašauskas) sums up the development of contemporary Lithuanian art in the 1990s. The first Lithuanian pavilion opens at the Venice Biennale (artists: Eglė Rakauskaitė and Mindaugas Navakas, commissioner: Lolita Jablonskienė).
- 2000** Artūras Raila takes part in *Manifesta 3* in Ljubljana. Lithuanian pavilion for the *EXPO 2000* in Hannover is designed by the young architects Audrius and Marina Bucas, Aida Ceponyte and Ozarinskas, Gintaras Kuginys. M. K. Čiurlionis's exhibition opens at Musée d'Orsay in Paris.
- Timeline compiled by Elona Lubyte
Translated by Aušra Simanavičiūtė

Antanas Gudaitis

(b. 1904 Šiauliuose — d. 1989 Vilnius)

fig. 63

Antanas Gudaitis's works serve as an appreciable and convincing chain, linking the rudiments of pre-war modern art with post-war compromises and novelties, so reflecting the complex evolution of Lithuanian artistic culture. Gudaitis was one of the initiators and most consistent supporters of the ideas proclaimed by Ars, the group formed in the 1930s, famous for its resolute reformist theoretical and practical manifesto. In the early period, his artistic manner matured through actively rejecting the illustrative, sentimental, 'content based' painting traditions of the early twentieth century and turning to the search for a visually expressive and aesthetically valid artistic form. Rather than revealing any underlying subject-matter, canvases such as *Still Life with a Statuette* 1924 and *In the Market* 1929 — painted as early as the 1920s, whilst studying with Justinas Vienožinskis at the Art School in Kaunas — demonstrate a plastic expression and a penchant for the generalisation of the motifs of selected forms in a manner that is both emotional and constructive. His studies at the State Higher School of Applied and Decorative Art in Paris between 1929 and 1932 were of great encouragement to him. The works he created in the pre-war period (*Musicians* 1930, *In the Circus* 1932, *A Small House in Vieksniai* 1933, *Woman and Child* 1933 and *Zemaite on Holiday* 1939)

are particularly notable for their merging of the expressive and classical tendencies of that time, the coordination of the emotional and rational aspects of a creative idea, and the priority given to painterly qualities like colour and texture.

In the late 1950s the artist's work underwent a period of significant change. His painting acquired a more contrasting colourist and textural expression, an emotional, vital monumentality and a poly-semantic approach towards genre. The recurrent images of a woman, a bird and a horse in the works of that period (*Three Petroneles* 1964, *A Woman with a Bird* 1966, *Horses and People* 1968, *Rage* 1960–7 and *Old Animals* 1969) — appear as abstracted plastic icons, possessing a symbolic and formal significance for the fate of Gudaitis' painting. The painterly expressiveness of his last works (*The Prodigal Son* 1971, *Acrobat* 1973, *Self-Portrait against a Dark Background* 1987, *Self-Portrait with a Bird* 1981 and *A Woman and Two White Birds* 1987–8) — is characterised by contrasts between somewhat sharply combined colours, a vividly textural surface on the mass of paint, a formal plastic independence and still-life interpretation of a chosen motif. There is also a lack of any importance in the subject-matter of the painting, creating a suggestive work that through its plasticity, lends itself to philosophical interpretations.

Helmutas Šabasevičius

Translated by Laimutė Zabulienė

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R. Paknio leidykla, Vilnius 2000, p.52

Vincas Kisaruskas

(b. 1934 Baisiogala village, Radviliškis district —
d. 1988 New York)

fig. 73

Vincas Kisaruskas was a versatile artist. His interests ranged from painting and assemblage to mosaic, printing, theatre set design and academic research (his study of book design *Lietuvos knygos-enklai, 1518–1918* was published in 1984). After graduating in 1959, he quickly established himself at the forefront of the Lithuanian avant-garde art movement, which was recovering from the universally imposed academic style. In post-war Lithuania, Kisaruskas was making the first assemblages (*Twins* 1970, *Figure* 1970 and *Two Figures* 1972), printing hundreds of ex-libris (which he later sent abroad to exhibitions, so forging some contact

with the outside world), writing on cultural issues and creating his own remarkable style of painting. In 1970 he wrote: 'I always wanted and still want to say something strange, tragically strange, severely, unattractively strange.'

A variety of influences can be discerned in Kisaruskas's paintings: a particular combination of constructivism and expressionism with some glances towards pop art and echoes of medieval religious motifs. What distinguishes Kisaruskas's paintings is not only the deformed angular figure in abstract space and the fields of conflicting bright colours — often delineated with black, but more importantly, the relentless change and reversal of perspective that interrupts space (*Carcass Meat* 1967, *People in the Evening* 1971, *Self-Portrait of 1976* 1976 and *Zodiacal Twins* 1976).

Misleading the viewer's perception, however, was not the artist's intention. The use of dynamic shapes and dissonant colours was intended to express the pain and absurdity of existence. On the one hand, this was political: Kisaruskas had to live under conditions of restricted freedom, when abstract art and experimentation with visual language verged on the criminal. On the other hand, it was universal: the artist believed that humanity could only be revealed through tragic drama. Thus, he repeatedly painted a painfully distorted human figure, reminiscent of Picasso (*Falling Figure* 1967–8, *Figure* 1972 and *No* 1973). In his so-called 'Brutal Series', Kisaruskas turned an anonymous female body into a nightmare of sexual desire (*Two Torsos* 1969 and *Two Seated Figures* 1969–70). The artist also represented himself in a fragmented style, placing his own photographic self-portraits into painted box-like compartments (*Composition with 11 Portraits of the Artist* 1972 and *Four Self-Portraits with Four Observers* 1972). Throughout his life Kisaruskas interpreted tragic events found in the dramas of Sophocles and in Christian writings (*At the Table I* 1967, *At the Table II* 1975, *Oedipus* 1979–80 and *Antigone* 1981). Later, the Prodigal Son and Oedipus became the artist's alter egos — aware of the excruciating power of destiny (*A Gray Day of Oedipus* 1980, *Prodigal Son* 1980–1 and *Oedipus Tries to Guess his Destiny* 1986).

In the mid 1970s, Kisaruskas' painting underwent a change, which the author acknowledged in 1984 by organising his solo exhibition of leaning figures at the National Library, Vilnius. Bright colours were replaced with dark grey and black; expressionism

gave way to the rationality of abstraction; the broken dynamic space was replaced by emptiness; human figures moved from the centre of the visual field towards the edges (*The Pain of Withdrawal* 1980, *Ismene and Antigone* 1980–1 and *Prodigal Son* 1981). With the expanding empty space threatening to annihilate him, the former hero of his paintings lost stability. On reflection, these shifts seem prophetic since his sudden death soon after brought the artist's flight to an abrupt end.

Agnė Narusyte

Juozas Mikėnas

(b. 1901 Skardupis (now Latvia) — d. 1964 Vilnius)

fig. 3

From 1931 Mikėnas taught art in Lithuania and participated in the activities of the modernist artists' group Ars. At the same time he started to secure major state commissions and to earn critical acclaim and recognition. Mikėnas's *The Pensive Christ* 1937, *Lithuania* 1939, *The First Swallow* 1964 and *Peace* 1960 are perhaps the most frequently reproduced Lithuanian sculptural works of the twentieth century. He is primarily considered as a master of sculptural allegory, who consistently developed the classical principles of form. In Paris, where Mikėnas completed his advanced studies, the environment of neo-traditionalist ideas influenced him.

During the war, as though trying to escape from the tragic reality around him, Mikėnas produced sculptures representing farmers resting in the fields, painted portraits and developed an iconography of the harp-player. But any further attempt to hide from everyday reality and retreat into a world of poetry and dreams of peace and quiet became impossible with the advent of Soviet rule in 1945. And yet, can we consider Mikėnas's post-war works to be a compromise and collaboration? This would certainly seem to be true of his monuments to the various figures of the communist pantheon. We cannot deny the titles of honour bestowed upon him by the Soviet authorities. Mikėnas was a Professor, a Corresponding Member of the Soviet Union Academy of Art, as well as a People's Artist of the Soviet Union and of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic.

Nonetheless, nowadays the public monuments Mikėnas made during the Soviet period are no longer considered to be his most significant sculptural works, and were they to be his only artistic contribution, his name would be confined to the footnotes of art history. Mikėnas's calling was to create works in the official style.

He oriented himself towards the commissioner i.e. the state, which at the beginning of his career was the independent state of Lithuania, then after the war, the occupying Soviets. At the same time he was the poet of timeless values, who did not cease to cherish the artistic principles he had adopted in his youth. What interests us today is precisely those works — drawings, sketches and small sculptures — that marked the beginning of Lithuania's participation in the 'great cultural race of the European nations'. These works record Mikėnas's journey to artistic maturity, demonstrating the importance of the French environment on his work as well as tracing the changes he experienced through immersion in a Lithuanian cultural background. They are also a testament to his importance to Lithuanian culture in the period between the wars, as well as his relevance during the Soviet era.

Elona Lubyte

Translated by Aušra Simanavičiūtė

Deimantas Narkevičius

(b. 1964 Utena. Lives and works in Vilnius.)

fig. 228

The following is an attempt to briefly outline the crucial elements of Deimantas Narkevičius's artistic strategy. On numerous occasions, the artist has declared his interest in the tradition of avant-garde culture and its reflections on common social discourse. However, it is not easy to locate the signs of a radical avant-garde in Lithuanian cultural history. It is therefore natural that Narkevičius moves away from familiar cultural realities and looks for themes where signs of avant-garde movements are more apparent.

Whereas Narkevičius's earlier films such as *Europe 54°54'–25°19'* 1997 and *Mass for The Truth of Blacksmith Ignotas* 1998 travel through the fundamental themes of contemporary social discourse, it is the perception of history and the transformations resulting from its ideological interpretations that are perhaps the most important focus of his work today.

He performs an action opposite to the habitual mechanism, producing the ideological stereotypes of social discourse. The latter emerge not only because of the lack of historical dimension and knowledge, but also by eliminating personal experience or turning it into neutral abstractions. Narkevičius's latest films (*His-story* 1998, *Legend Coming True* 1999 and *Energy Lithuania* 2000), return to the individual experience of history. In order to achieve this, he casts people

touched by the historical phenomena that he is interested in, as the heroes of his films. These characters relate their own points of view, creating a subjective dimension that allows the artist not only to convey his political outlook, but also to avoid another stereotypical trap of social discourse — the imperative being to speak the universal and indisputable ‘Truth’.

Jonas Valatkevičius

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Mindaugas Navakas

(b. 1952 Kaunas. Lives and works in Vilnius.)

fig. 162

Navakas was the first Lithuanian artist to react to profound changes in Western art. Although he works with traditional materials, demonstrating a great sensitivity to their natural properties and applying a solid craft, after 1980 he became the first Lithuanian sculptor to engage in a conceptual art practice. In becoming the first Lithuanian artist since late 1970s to start creating non-figurative and non-decorative sculptures for public spaces, he lifted one more taboo. He is interested in tools, equipment, benches, thrones and vessels — objects that can have a ritual character, while preserving an ordinary, everyday purpose. He does not employ these as found objects but transforms them into archetypal sculptural signs. Navakas’s works are determined by a multi-layered tension. His sculptures display harmony between an image and symbol, everyday and ritual. The functional and non-functional as well as noble and comic aspects are brought together to form a unified whole.

For Navakas, sculpture in the city requires quite a different approach to sculpture in the landscape. He turned to the radical route of experimentation in this sphere of work from about 1982, with zincographic prints, which in 1988 were collected into the publication *Vilnius Notebook*. In this case a conceptual solution serves as the starting point. His sculptural projects manifest themselves as a conscious and paradoxical antithesis, which enables the sculptor to look for an ironic dialogue with urban cityscapes or individual buildings.

Navakas has created a surprisingly large number of monumental sculptures, such as *Armor* 1977, *Flat Quadruped* 1978, *Barrier* 1985, *Section II* 1989, *Reliant Sculpture* 1992, *A Hook* 1994, *A Landscape Piece* 1998, *Three Large Reliant Sculptures* and *The Reliant Sculpture* 1999, and *Balcony* 2000. As most of these works were completed without any public commission being granted in advance, he had to make do with meagre financial resources. The artist has participated in many competitions and has enthusiastically organised and realised numerous group projects. Navakas has also inspired many sculptors with an unconventional practice to undertake daring projects independently, without relying on outside support. This was the environment from which the *Stone Sculpture Symposia* in Klaipeda and the *Concrete Sculpture Symposia* in Vilnius emerged and were realised.

In this context Navakas has developed an original form of ‘social sculpture’. Despite the fact that he employs rather traditional media, the provocative and ironic character of his works unnerved Soviet authorities. While the artist’s works often incite local public opinion and arouse the indignation of the press, it is this quality that has established Navakas’s strong influence on other, particularly younger, Lithuanian artists.

Raminta Jurėnaitė

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Artūras Raila

(b. 1962 Rainaičiai village, Panevezys district.

Lives and works in Vilnius.)

fig. 161

Every work by Artūras Raila is a surprise or provocation with regard to intellectual and social habits. His provocations sharpen the discussion and articulate new determinations of artistic conventions, taking previous traditions to their limits whilst still showing some restraint. He transforms the monotony of repeated action into the sense of pure existence, and uses dramatic autobiographical events as an artistic story. Using his own experience as a cautionary lesson, he may seem to declare a somewhat old-fashioned romantic ‘maximalism’, but a neutral correctness of logical action helps to keep his artistic programme relevant and open. The video project *The Girl is Innocent* 1999 is one such example; it documents a

retrogressive evaluation of pupils' work and resulted in Raila's departure from the art gymnasium. Clearly his position is more risky and 'dirtier' than splashing paint onto a canvas, where after the work is finished, hands can be washed, leaving all the dirt on the canvas.

A dispute with modernism has been one of the more consistent and important themes in his work; from the public burning of his early wooden sculptures (*Eighty Slides for Carousel Projector* 1993), through the material sculptural objects (*64 Stones and Chains* 1993), and his perfectly structured actions/performances (*Once You Pop, You Can't Stop* 1997 and *We or Nobody* 1998), to the broadly educational didacticism of his recent videos. Public reaction to his work is usually a mixture of silent admiration and neutrality, resulting not so much from the lack of open discourse in the Lithuanian context, as Raila's sophisticated, silent yet intellectually acute and precarious social position. It is also worth mentioning the artist's work with members of the contemporary neo-fascist Lithuanian political organisation in the video *Under the Flag* 2000.

Birute Pankunaite

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Eglė Rakauskaitė

(b. 1967 Vilnius. Lives and works in Vilnius.)

fig. 173

The work of Eglė Rakauskaitė can be distinguished by its particular 'femininity'. It should be noted that her work doesn't concern itself with common feminist issues (she consciously avoids the context of feminism) but rather those of particular relevance to the tendencies of contemporary women's art. The artist also appears to have a greater interest in the visual rather than the ideological content of these issues. In many cases, her projects develop sequentially (transforming through a series of changes). Her most acclaimed work to date *Trap: Expulsion from Paradise* 1995, a live sculpture involving a dozen young girls dressed in confirmation robes each with their long hair braided into a tight net that ties them together, has been revived three times (in Vilnius, Warsaw and Istanbul). It revealed the subtle and deep poetry of virginity, once shining with modesty and

nobility, sometimes glistening with beauty and arrogance or pulsating with philosophical nuances. The artist is also developing the theme of 'dressing the (woman's) body'. At first a slough made of hair (*Hairy* 1994) covers the hairless parts of the female body revealing the others (on the contrary), then a fragile dress made of flower petals (*For Virginia* 1994–8), a fur-coat made of delicate natural female hair (*Fur Coat for Child* 1996) and finally the naked body of the artist herself covered in honey and fat (*In Honey* 1996, *In Fat* 1998), completing a vast array of tactile bodily experience. But Rakauskaitė does not repeat herself — she is cyclic. The process-based nature of creation, demonstration and perception is the essential feature of her works and the assurance of their vitality. This is also true of the materials she uses; chocolate, berries, flower petals, honey, fat, etc., all arouse the senses, provoking a variety of sensations that range from aversion to attraction. At the same time, the materials reveal another specific trait of the artist's work — its attractiveness (also in an erotic sense), which becomes a unique style. The artistic composition of the images she creates is mixed, polysemantic and loose. In her latest projects (mostly video-films, *Gariunai* 2002, *Another Breathing* 2001–3, *My America* 2004, etc.) the artist combines her previously established strategies with a deeper insight into the contemporary social environment.

Lolita Jablonskienė

Translated by Laimutė Zabulienė

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Petras Repšys

(b. 1940 Šiauliai. Lives and works in Vilnius.)

fig. 105

The work of Petras Repšys, winner of the 1997 national prize for culture and art, has developed in a polyphonic manner. Each new line of research, new area of interest, forms an opposition or addition to all his previous activities. These experiments are connected by the peculiarities of Repšys's personality and temperament as well as by his vigorous independence of thought and judgment. His art is vital, without pathos and is always subjective.

From 1961 to 1976 Repšys worked in the field of book illustration and printmaking. Here, his two sources of individual style and the two generating powers of his poetics became distinct: archaic forms of Lithuanian folk art and Renaissance and Baroque

culture, both the standard Western version and the version that had developed its own particular renown in Vilnius. This principal orientation of creative interests is manifested in his experiments in miniature genres — ex libris and medal.

The period between 1976 and 1985 was devoted to producing the ensemble of frescos, *Seasons* 1977–85, for the Centre of Lithuanian Studies at Vilnius University. This huge complicated composition demonstrated Repšys's philosophical principles and his concept of the mythological worldview of ancient Balts.

In the period from 1984–5 Repšys's graphic works showed signs of freedom from monumental restraint. His style became free, sketchy, even displaying an impressive virtuosity. This work was a combination of print and 'nature sketch' and demonstrates an attempt to impressionistically fix as well as improvise the mood of a moment. The series *Vilnius* 1986–92 marks the beginning of a new tendency — 'Repšys's classicism.' This series of prints and the medals created some time later, are devoted to the memory of Lithuania's past battles, important personalities and historical towns. The compositions are simple but the works exude great strength, restraint and peace. Through working in direct opposition to the predominantly tense mentality during the deep transformations in the 1990s, Repšys found a unique place for himself in the contemporary Lithuanian art scene.

Aleksandra Aleksandravičiūtė
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100 Contemporary Lithuanian Artists,
R. Paknio leidykla, Vilnius 2000, p.132

Paulius and Svajonė Stanikas

Paulius Stanikas

(b. 1962 Vilnius. Lives and works in Vilnius.)

Svajonė Stanikienė

(b. 1961 Vilnius. Lives and works in Vilnius.)

fig. 201

Paulius and Svajonė Stanikas came to Lithuania's prestigious contemporary art spaces from relatively marginal exhibition sites: commercial art showroom window displays and decorative art galleries. Several aspects which characterise the Stanikas' work were established in their early storefront ceramics exhibitions: the forms of a deceptive reality, multiple meanings, direct reflections upon their environment and anthropocentrism.

Beginning with *Angels for the Year 2000*, large-scale photographs began to dominate their work, although they continued to uphold their main creative principle — a critique of aesthetic conventions and the conditional nature of beauty. In the large colour photographs, *Poems of Fire* 1995, they staged an auto-da-fé. It is undeniable that the Stanikas succeeded in showing the full horror of the corpse with an enviable power of suggestion, mastery and realism. It is precisely this sense of walking the line between fiction and horror that evokes a rich array of meanings and associations.

Body images (usually their own) are central to the Stanikas' work. They analyse the body as an aesthetic, emotional and sensual object. The Stanikas' bodies reveal all possible aspects of their being. They can be horrifyingly beautiful, repulsively seductive, waste producing and dead, bursting with sentimentality and dreamy. But all of the bodily metamorphoses possess one common characteristic — they have lost that which relates them to the visible or known world. In daring to speak about the unknown i.e. the things that we cannot or do not wish to see, the Stanikas attain an extreme level of 'political incorrectness'.

Drawing upon contemporary concepts, it is not difficult to describe metaphorically the medium of spiritual existence created by the Stanikas. The concepts of sex, weapons, drugs and rock-and-roll encapsulate man's ethical criteria at the end of the twentieth century. They can be taken at face value, as long as one does not forget that words no longer have, or are able to have, single or fixed meanings.

Saulius Grigoravičius

Translated by Laimutė Zabulienė

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100 Contemporary Lithuanian Artists,
R. Paknio leidykla, Vilnius 2000, p.146

Ričardas Povilas Vaitekūnas

(b. 1940 Kaunas. Lives and works in Vilnius.)

fig. 100

R. P. Vaitekūnas started his artistic career at the time of the Khrushchov 'thaw', when some freedoms in intellectual and artistic fields became acceptable. In Lithuania a younger generation of artists were becoming noticeably more active. Exhibition halls opened their doors to pre-war art and the works of its representatives, including the emigrants.

Pre-war painting, most notably that of A. Samuolis and v. Eidukevičius, exerted an influence on the formation of Vaitekūnas' personality, especially with regard to his views. He was looking for a plastic generalisation and the advantages of gestural, free painting (*A Boat* 1966, *Kites* 1966, *A Ball* 1966). The time spent at Pažaislis (1967–75) — a former monastery used as a mental hospital during the Soviet occupation, and later as artists studios, when the M. K. Čiurlionis museum gained ownership — had a strong influence on the formation of the artistic and ideological aspirations of his work. The environment and cultural value of the architectural ensemble gave rise to various metaphors, motifs and symbols in his paintings (*Tree* 1967, *A Woman with Flowers in a Leaning Landscape* 1975). The Pažaislis period revealed some of the peculiarities of his artistic nature and emotional attitude: a tendency to associate, symbolise, anthropomorphise a motif and to abstract it to the level of an iconic trace. One can discern a certain resolve to emphasise a painterly origin as well as all the possibilities of the colouring. The same period reveals his desire to adopt simple motifs, which often consisted of several layers of meaning (cultural, personal, family life, historical, etc.): prayer books, crosses, candles, clocks, old cloth and old, worn out things. His landscape work from the mid-1980s displays a laconic separation of the sky and earth; the contrast between the bright white colour of the sky and the green of the earth, amongst other rich colours (*Scarecrow and a White Cloud* 1985, *Summer I, II* 1987). Some time later in still-lives the artist demonstrated a subtle harmony of colour, employing dark colours and mixing paint in an attempt to harmonise green with violet and brown (*Still-Life with a Wooden Lamb* 1988, *Still-Life with a Candle* 1991, *Sunflowers* 2002). Early in his career, in both his landscapes and still-lives, Vaitekūnas started to use the technique of drawing with the reverse end of the brush into a canvas thickly coated with paint (*Three Clouds and Three Fishermen* 1973, *Wall* 1979, *Still-Life with a Clock* 1986, *Still-Life with a Red Box* 1986–7). This method of painting using a 'fat' coat, emphasises the notion that a painterly interpretation of the motif can dominate.

Viktoras Liutkus

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Vladas Vildžiūnas

(b. 1932 Dabužiai village, Anykščiai district.

Lives and works in Vilnius.)

fig. 37

Vladas Vildžiūnas is a Lithuanian sculptor from an older generation, a pioneer of the local (quiet) modernism of the 1960s and a patriarch of national romantic monumental sculpture. He was born in the inter-war Lithuanian Republic and began his studies at the ideological school, where socialist realism was imposed. His teachers' creative style was formed under the influence of French neo-classicism (J. Mikėnas) and the national folk art tradition. The post-Stalinist thaw of the 1950s made Vildžiūnas turn to Lithuanian folk sculpture. In the late 1960s the heroes of socialist labour and military liberators gave way to national heroes romanticised in a Vildžiūnian style.

Through the process of gradually turning towards a modernisation of form, the outer imitation of the shape of Lithuanian folk sculpture was substituted for a rational interpretation. In his search for the 'transformation' of the old sculptural form, the artist analysed the methods of classic inter-war modernists such as H. Moore and J. Lipchitz.

As a publicly active artist, Vildžiūnas did not only limit himself to artistic activities. At his house in Jerusalem, a suburb of Vilnius, artists, sculptors and cultural figures of various generations, critical of the Soviet power, used to gather. Accumulated there was an officially unacceptable collection of contemporary Lithuanian art and literature, which was hard to access in public libraries. There was also visual material (photographs, films) on modern trends in Western art. In due course, his sculptor colleagues — G. Karalius, P. Mazūras, M. Navakas and others — built their studios nearby, where particularly in the 1980s, they initiated many artistic activities such as casting in bronze and concrete from originals, organising group exhibitions, and publishing. On Vildžiūnas's initiative, this colony of artists from different generations was legalised in 1992, under the title Jerusalem Sculpture Gardens, and a gallery was constructed in the gardens. In 1988, at the outset of the National liberation movement, the parliament of the students of the Art Institute asked the patriarch of Lithuanian modern sculpture to lecture and become Head of the sculpture department at the reformed Vilnius Art Academy.

Elona Lubytė

Translated by Laimutė Zabulienė

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Biographies

Antanas Gudaitis

- Studied 1926-8, Kaunas Art School and Lithuanian University, Kaunas; 1929-33 Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers, Department of Monumental Painting, Paris; private studies at Alexandra Ekster, André Lhote; Colarossi and L'Académie Julian (Paris).

Vincas Kisarauskas

- Studied 1953-9 Painting Department, State Art Institute, Vilnius (now known as the Vilnius Academy of Fine Arts).

Juozas Mikėnas

- Studied 1922-6 Kaunas Art School; 1927-31 André Lhote studio, Académie de la Grande Chaumière, Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs, Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers, L'Académie Julian (Paris).

Deimantas Narkevičius

- Studied 1987-94 Sculpture Department, Vilnius Academy of Fine Arts (formerly known as the State Art Institute).

Mindaugas Navakas

- Studied 1970-7 Architecture and Sculpture Department, State Art Institute (now known as the Vilnius Academy of Fine Arts), Vilnius.

Artūras Raila

- Studied 1983-9, Sculpture Department, State Art Institute, Vilnius.

Eglė Rakauskaitė

- Studied 1985-93 Painting Department, Vilnius Academy of Fine Arts (formerly known as the State Art Institute).

Petras Repšys

- Studied 1960-7 Graphic Art Department, State Institute of Art (now known as the Vilnius Academy of Fine Arts), Vilnius.

Paulius Stanikas

- Studied 1980-5 Economics Faculty, Vilnius University.

Svajonė Stanikienė

- Studied 1982-7 Ceramics Department, State Art Institute, Vilnius.

Ričardas Povilas Vaitekūnas

- Studied 1958-64 Painting Department, State Art Institute, Vilnius.

Vladas Vildžiūnas

- Studied 1952-61 Sculpture Department, State Art Institute, Vilnius.



From left to right and top to bottom:

Antanas Gudaitis *The Prodigal Son* 1971

Vincas Kisarauskas *Four Self-Portraits with Four Observers* 1972

Juozas Mikėnas *Mother with Child* 1940

Deimantas Narkevičius *Energy Lithuania* 2000

Mindaugas Navakas *A Hook* 1994

Artūras Raila *The Cradle Guaranteeing a Pragmatic Infantility* 1994

Eglė Rakauskaitė *A Trap: Expulsion from Paradise* 1995

Petras Repšys *The Seasons* 1977-85

Paulius and Svajonė Stanikas *Your Father, Your Son and Your Daughter* 1998

Ričardas Povilas Vaitekūnas *The Meadow in Pazaislis* 1978

Vladas Vildžiūnas *Three Kings* 1967-8

Ten Years of Moldovan Contemporary Art

Lilia Dragneva

Considering a certain display of alternative manifestations, which more or less fit within the framework of officially accepted art in the earlier period, the emergence of a Moldovan contemporary art scene that is independent of regulations, dates back to the last decade of the twentieth century. Despite its somewhat belated appearance in a country with a totalitarian past, in which a flourishing Soviet realism made a smooth transition into national and folk motifs, the very fact of contemporary art's emergence cannot be categorised as an immanent or pre-programmed phenomenon. The fall of the Berlin Wall, which chronologically coincided with Moldova becoming a sovereign Republic (independence came in 1991), didn't in itself bring about structural changes in the sphere of art. Purposeful efforts were needed in order to synchronise creative quests with the mainstream searching of contemporary art.

Mark Verlan

(b. 1963 Cocieri. Lives and works in Chişinău.)

fig. 238

'If artists are shamans, then the most important thing they can convey is the feeling of one's own magical consciousness, that inner, organic perception of life.'¹

Mark Verlan, or 'Marioka, the Son of Rain', is one of the most prominent and at the same time one of the most original representatives of the Moldavian art scene. One could call him a kind of Moldovan shaman (if such a thing existed). He has been an anticipated and welcome guest at almost all major national art gatherings and has participated in many art events since the late 1980s — in most cases acting as a talisman. Verlan has always retained the position of 'the other', independent both ideologically and substantially. He has neither a personal statement in

his works, nor a clear artistic programme. His importance lies not only in his way of working but also of perceiving the world around him. He is a generator of diverse ideas who responds spontaneously to his immediate community and surroundings, and the outcome of the inductive influence of this environment.

One of Verlan's landmark actions, which also marked the emergence of contemporary art in Moldova, was *Barbie's Funeral*, part of his solo exhibition *Exodul*, organised in 1995. This action, which included a mass march on the streets of Chişinău with a Barbie doll, broken after a car accident, then buried in the garden of Open World House (opened by Soros Foundation in Moldova), started a new period in local visual arts, symbolising a western standard of contemporary art implemented on Moldovan ground by the Soros Center for Contemporary Art.

A coffin for Barbie.

The funeral of Barbie.

Tamagochi lying on the grave.

Flowers growing around it.²

Verlan inextricably identifies himself with the place where he lives, turning this into a space parallel to the real one. He has created his own kingdom of Moldova, having proclaimed himself its Prince who, in his previous life, was the graphic chevalier of the drawn kingdom 'NGUKK PA' struggling for the independence of non-existent peoples. Moldova is located on an egg-shaped globe, whose axis represents the branch of a vine. The heraldic symbol that embellishes the flag and the other state insignia is a cat, while the copper coins of the kingdom, each with the nominal value of one Marioka, bear the effigy of the Prince. To conclude the project, he developed, together with the

artist Igor Scherbina, the passport for his kingdom. This allows anyone who so wishes to identify himself with the parallel world of a non-existent place.

Cartography occupies a special place in his work. In his graphic works such as *World Map* 1998, and *The Creative Kingdom of Moldova* 1997, he uses real territories as pieces of a puzzle, mixing them with imaginary places and arranging them all as he sees fit. This makes us think of the indeterminacy and fluidity of the current geo-political space. Geo-political structures become inconstant, breaking up into basic elements, which the artist uses as mosaic pieces.

Identity emerges from the positioning of the personality/character *vis-à-vis* the newly created reality. Here we see two equally powerful and interconnected sides of the geo-artistic discourse — creator-manager and/or the territory he has made.

In a theatrical (and ironic) way, Verlan uses various ideological characters, for example, his postage stamps *Lenin and Pinocchio* 1998, or the doll entitled *Lenin's Embryo* 1996. He writes letters to various parts of the world — to the people of Vietnam, to Tina Turner, etc., develops projects that are impossible to implement, such as an exhibition in space or an elevator spanning the earth's poles. Much of the artist's work is material in a verbal form (stories he tells) or stacked in a big portfolio.

All these are part of one big art project, which is Verlan himself twenty-four hours a day, every day.

Pavel Brăila

(b. 1972 Chişinău. Lives and works in Chişinău and Berlin.)

fig. 241

Pavel Brăila is one of the most successful artists on the Moldovan scene. He first encountered (and at the same time started to make) art at the first *CarbonART3* event — rather than on the benches of the art college or institute of art as others did. If for other Moldovan artists *CarbonART* was a workshop and a first introduction to contemporary art methods and techniques, for Pavel Brăila it was an introduction to art in general. This 'blank page' beginning distinguishes him from others and provided flexibility and space for prompt artistic development. For this reason Brăila was the first to sever links with the Moldovan art tradition. While the local art scene was trying to rid itself of the old methods by turning to new tools, by mimicking, counterfeiting, appropriating

and thus trying to achieve a synchronisation with the Western art process, Brăila gained a direct insight into the current international art discourse through a scholarship at the Jan van Eyck Academy in Maastricht. The 'how to' artistic attitude he met there was therefore his first one i.e. he was able to avoid the painful process of balancing between the customary old system and the new, artificially-created art situation engaged in by Moldovan artists at that time, much of whose energy went into the rearticulating and positioning of 'new art' in the Moldovan environment. Brăila meanwhile became established in the general Western art scene, directly articulating and promoting the 'Moldovan problematic'.

As a result of what can be seen as a successful application of Western work practices into work with a Moldovan context, Brăila made the film *Shoes for Europe* 2002, together with cameramen Vladislav Hâncu and Radu Zara. The piece, which is a documentation of the railway gauge change at the border between Moldova and Romania, captures the contradictions between East and West. Exhibited as part of *Documenta II* it has become an important step towards the international recognition of contemporary Moldovan art.

Another of his pieces, *Barons' Hill* 2004, continues with the same technique of mixing contradictory ingredients. The architectural dream-like kitsch environment of the Gypsy that rolls in front of the viewer accompanied by the second part of Bach's *Concerto in D Minor* challenges us to reconsider or revise our conventions and standards. The eclectic Gypsy interiors filmed in Soroca (a town in the north of Moldova) represent both a blend of their owners' dreams and desires and a peculiar interpretation of beauty. While exposing the viewer to a dissonance of styles, classical music, and the precise and smooth camera movements of Vadim Hincu and Veceslav Cebotaru with editing by Denis Barteniev, Brăila again presents the Moldovan context and material in a Western-style.

While being among the first to apply Western strategies to the specific Moldovan situation in art, Pavel Brăila has maintained his pioneer status in Moldovan contemporary art. For Brăila, the contradictions between the post-Soviet and Western art systems that have stalled others, or the unresolvable crisis of identification, which is a barrier for many, serve as the springboard, the foundation for his new projects as well as the fuel that feeds his production.

Kinovari (imitatzia), the State Museum of Fine Arts, Chişinău 2000. Concept and organisation: Lilia Dragneva and Lucia Macari

fig. 233

In a cultural environment where there was no contemporary art whatsoever, the opening of the Center for Contemporary Art (CSAC), as part of the Soros Foundation, in the mid-1990s not only provided cultural stimulation, the institutional strengthening of existing art practice, and artistic democratisation, but also the grafting of a Western standard of contemporary art onto the Moldovan environment. Thus, the appearance of contemporary art in Moldova was not a process started by native artists, as had happened in other countries, but, rather, as paradoxical as it may seem, by the CSAC.

After a series of attempts by artists to find their identity and specificity through an erroneous exploitation of folklore while overlooking the particularities of modern society, which inherently possesses a specific and distinctive locality and therefore appears as more adequate, recognisable and contemporary, a project was started by the CSAC. This was based on the way that the local public, as well as the artists involved, perceive and absorb (the phenomenon of) contemporary art in Moldova — by appropriating, copying it.

This was neither a new nor (re)discovered trend in Moldova but rather a need to identify a place for contemporary art in order to enable its passage to a new stage of artistic activity through an awareness and re-articulation of the artist's position. After a period of unconscious synthesis (synthesized copying, unconsciously adapted to the local context), which was nothing else but an unconscious imitation of Western art, partly as a consequence of a lack of information (deficiencies in the curricula of art academies, lack of public interest combined with an insufficient degree of information for the people involved in the art life of Chişinău), the idea emerged that all this should be looked at from the position of an 'artistic incident.'

Thus, in 2000, a project entitled *Kinovari (imitatzia)* was initiated by the artistic duo Lilia Dragneva and Lucia Macari.⁴ This was based on imitations, copies and interpretations of twentieth century art works, including studio work, as well as a repetition of the artistic gesture (the appropriation of a newly re-created piece, signed by the new author).

Undeniably, the strategies of contemporary art assume the appropriation of images, objects and texts

as quotations, for the purpose of manipulation and play with cultural stereotypes. By appealing to the cultural memory of the viewer a new artistic appearance is created, a product of artistic reflection that results from the effective use of deconstruction. In this case the product is contemporary art itself, i.e. an analysis of its emergence in Moldova together with the cultural context and conventionality of contemporary art as a whole. The project was named *Kinovari (imitatzia)* after a brand of paint that was widely exported from St. Petersburg to Moldova during the Soviet period. By coincidence painters in Moldova used large quantities of paint by this manufacturer. The academic school of Moldova's State University of Arts was also an imitation of the St. Petersburg school.

Kinovari (cinnabar, red mercuric sulfide HgS, an oxide-based chemical compound found in the form of a reddish crystalline rock) is used in manufacturing oil paints. As it is unstable in the open environment (it becomes oxidised and loses its colour), a synthetic cinnabar-analogous pigment is used in painting.

At the entrance of the museum hosting the work from the project a jar of red paint (*Kinovari*) was mounted on a pedestal. Next to this the stamp of the project was placed. This stamp had been applied to all the pieces produced for the exhibition; the stamp was also put on wall texts to show the route from one piece and text to the next one. Each viewer was to read the project's explanatory text, displayed at the door to the next room.

The first exhibition room was an allusion to one of Ilya Kabakov's installations: the walls featured sheets of Internet pages (with the URLs) and photocopies from the books, which served as the basis for the works displayed in the room. The following rooms were organised according to the traditional principles for exhibiting works of art in a gallery. Next to each piece there was an explanatory text drafted by the participating artists and the exact references to the work's prototype. It was possible to look only at the newly created works, or to navigate also looking at the copies of originals, or, to start with a room where artists' texts were exhibited under glass.

Thus, a new approach to the issue of the artificial emergence of the contemporary art scene in Moldova was proposed. This worked as a simulacrum, by replacing the 'unconscious information synthesis' with 'conscious imitation'. The project continued with the construction of an imaginary dialogue, an ideal

discussion forum — based on excerpts from articles on appropriation by known artists, art critics and theoreticians who had not discussed these issues with each other. This allowed a connection between previous and current points of view.

Ștefan Rusu

(b. 1964 Caiet. Lives and works in Chișinău and Bucharest.)

fig. 242

Obviously, the sheer living personality creates around itself some sort of tension, possesses a real energy field or a combination of fields.⁵

As well as being one of the leading Moldovan artists, Ștefan Rusu also works as a curator, analyst and organiser. Both his works and curatorial projects offer a competent and reflexive overview of Moldovan contemporary art as part of the geographical, social and political space in which he exists and to which he belongs.

Based on a revaluation or revision of history and the artist's attitude today, Rusu considers the positioning of the artist in society as one of the main elements in the strategy of development and initiation of a local discourse. Through the lens of history, Rusu analyses and reveals certain geographical, social and political strata. These might be processes of manipulation and ideologisation of society, the economic development and blossoming of the Republic of Moldova, or symbolic personalities and characters — as the founders of the so-called national identity, which has been brought into question numerous times and which triggers debate to the present day.

He also analyses the emergence of contemporary art in Moldova. In his project *UFO Convention* (a project due to be realised in 2006), he interpreted contemporary art as alien, a deviation from the normal, a concept fallen from the sky or brought in by extraterrestrial beings.

One of Rusu's landmark large-scale projects was *INVASIA (Invasion)* realised in 2001 (this included an art camp, a conference and an exhibition), which also determined his further research of Eurasian space.⁶ By turning to major geopolitical factors of the past, such as the expansion of the Golden Horde in the Middle Ages, the project represents one of the

comparative motivations that fuels the debate around cultural imperialism, globalisation and the westernisation of contemporary society. For this project, artists and theoreticians from Mongolia, Siberia, former Central-Asian and Caucasian Soviet Republics, and countries of Central and Eastern Europe were invited to participate in the reconstruction of the invasion — this time a cultural one. Unlike previous projects realised in Moldova, with *Invasion Rusu* suggested an original reorientation of the cultural dialogue.

With his ongoing project *PROTECT GREEN TERRITORIES!* (2004 onwards), in which the Green Brotherhood invited Asian as well as some European countries, including Moldova, to participate, Rusu also suggested a personal interpretation of Eurasianity. The first action of the Green Brotherhood took place in Kyrgyzstan in 2004 and included representatives from both the Asian and European art worlds.

Using as a starting point the associative power of words Rusu chose the name Frunze which in Romanian means the leaf of a tree — at first sight a trivial choice. M. V. Frunze (b. 1885 — d. 1925), a native of Transnistria, was a political and military figure, the commander of the Southern Group of Troops of the Eastern and Turkmen fronts during the Civil War. His name is used by Rusu as a derivative — the environmental society (the greens); the interpretation of green as a virginal, uncorrupted colour, but also as the colour of camouflage. The house-museum of Frunze, which was opened in Bishkek during the period of Bolshevik propaganda, also houses a priceless herbarium of rare plants collected by Frunze throughout his life during his long expeditions. This information gives the project a complete and theoretically grounded motivation.

As Rusu explains: 'by our action we wanted to swap roles and position Frunze as the founder of the Green Brotherhood movement and of a process of exorcism in the territories and regions that he himself conquered. The Green Territories cover the regions of Central Asia, Siberia and the Far East, thus creating a counterpart in time and space for the SSRM project...'⁷ Rusu was thus calling on current and future participants of the Green Brotherhood movement to protect and guard, as well as to initiate the culturalisation of the geographical areas that represent unexploited territories, such as Central Asia, Siberia, Mongolia and the Far East.

Translated from Russian by Iulian Robu

- 1 G. Safarova, 'Vozvrashchenie Beloy Aruany, ili Otvetstvennost' Stat' Motsartom' (The Return of the White Aruan, or The Responsibility of Becoming Mozart), in www.undp.kz/projects/files/118-19028.htm
- 2 I. Kukulín, 'Aleksandru Anashevichu' (To Alexander Anashevich) 1997, in www.vavilon.ru/textonly/issue8/kukulín.html
- 3 The first CarbonART, was organised by SCCA Chişinău and held in Sadova, Calarasi, in the summer of 1996. The second CarbonART, born out of a collaboration between the SCCA Chişinău and SCCA Odesa, was an international event taking place in a national park called Radenii Vechi. Conceived as a 'creative camp for those artists who, in the opinion of the organisers, were the opposite of "official" artistic production', this was 'the first artistic event of Republic of Moldova that highlighted new media and forms of expression.' O. G. Esanu, *CarbonART*, (exh. cat.), SCCA, Chişinău 1997
See ican.artnet.org/ican/text?id_text=32
- 4 www.art.md/kinovari
- 5 L. Gumilyov, *Geografia etnosa v istoricheskii period* (The Geography of Ethnicity in a Historic Period), Nauka 1990
- 6 www.art.md/invasia/ro.html
- 7 Ş. Rusu, 'MD featuring ID, or references to MoldGoL space', in *Donumenta Ars Danubiana* (exh. cat.), Regensburg 2004



From left to right and top to bottom:

Mark Verlan *The Prince of the Kingdom of Moldova* 2002

Pavel Brăila *Barons' Hill* 2004

Lilia Dragneva & Lucia Macari *Kinovari (Imitatzia)* 2001

Ştefan Rusu *Frunzel/Green Territories* 2004

Mapping Polish Artists

Piotr Piotrowski

Mirosław Bałka

(b. 1958 Warsaw)

fig. 171

Mirosław Bałka deals with the body in both his figurative and non-figurative art. By relating his non-representational works to the tradition of minimal art, we can say that he simultaneously avoids producing what Michael Fried once accused minimal art of, namely, an 'object-like theatricality'. Both his non-representative and his figurative sculptures have a concrete, bodily character. What interests Bałka is the materiality of this bodily character.

According to the artist, in his work *Saint Adalbert* 1987, he was interested in a peculiar commodity exchange, that of suffering and pain in exchange for gold. St. Adalbert's body was exchanged for the same weight in gold. 'In the figure of St. Adalbert, a Czech chosen as the patron saint of Poland, I observed the suffering of a masochist, so my sculpture contains elements of a game with suffering. The saint's body is mutilated, it lacks hands, a head, a penis and feet.'

At the same time Bałka's non-figurative works often have a personal dimension, they're rooted in his own carnality and in local history. The measurements of his objects, their temperature, the specific type of their mythology, often refer to the artist's own body (e.g. a height of 190 cm) as well as his own memories of childhood experiences: his home in Otwock, his religious upbringing within Catholic ritual and his carnal obsessions and adolescent problems. The psychological damage of the post-war imagination, full as it was of references to national martyrdom, as well as the company of his grandfather, who was a professional tombstone carver, during their frequent visits to the cemetery, all this can be found in his works. The problems of a childhood in the surroundings of the Otwock cemetery seem to be especially interesting in

the context of the biographical and typological genesis of Mirosław Bałka's art. The subject of 'the record of the body' has been realised in an entire series of works titled *Ramp*, which were denoted with measurements and numbers, and exhibited in Eindhoven and Łódź in 1994. Certainly, these are not anthropomorphic objects, nevertheless, they are directly linked to the human body. As already mentioned, they are defined by measurements but also by a temperature evoking the 'natural' or 'normal' temperature of the human body.

Jerzy Bereś

(b. 1930 Slaków)

fig. 93

One extremely significant series of events by Jerzy Bereś included his performance *Prophecy I* in the Foksal Gallery, Warsaw in 1968. This was followed by the related work *Prophecy II*, which was performed several times from 1968–88 in Krakow, and which concluded with *Prophecy II Comes True* in 1989 in Cieszyn. During *Prophecy I* the artist, with the help of the audience, dragged a fallen tree from a nearby park into the gallery, and then, wearing only a red and white piece of canvas, assembled a 'work', crowned with a bow, whose red and white string was made from his 'garment'. *Prophecy II* was his response to violent attacks in the press, which appeared during the very tense political situation in early March 1968, when there were mass demonstrations by students and a brutal anti-Semitic campaign by the communist authorities. Bereś's performance was actually provoked, as it were, by a journalist from the influential Warsaw weekly newspaper *Kultura*, who under the pen-name 'Hamilton' published some preposterous and arrogant feuilletons on various aspects of modern culture. Bereś placed a cart of timber in the middle of the Krakow Krzysztofory Gallery and then,

once again clad in red and white and helped by the audience, lit some fires using copies of *Kultura*. After a while he ascended the high pile of timber, made a huge bow with red and white string on its top, and then, having asked for a burning chip from one of the fires, blew the flame out and using its charcoal tip signed the whole structure with the word 'work.' During his final *Prophecy*, which also took place at a turning point in Polish history — in this case April 1989, following the signing of the so-called 'round-table agreement' which put an end to the communist monopoly on power — Bereś, having first repeated some gestures known from the previous performances, finished his presentation by writing the words 'spełnia się' ('comes true') on his body and putting a red and a white dot on his penis.

In the *Prophecies* the artist called his body a 'monument'. This same motif appeared very distinctly in another performance called *The Artist's Monument* (Warcino-Kępcice 1978). In this work the artist, wearing a wooden perizonium with the inscription 'the artist's body', and with a flag on his arm inscribed with the words 'the artist's soul', walked a few kilometres from Warcino to Kępcice in the north of Poland, all the while pulling a tree-trunk like a wheel-barrow. When he arrived, he made a circle of white footprints with paint, placed his wheelbarrow at the centre, burned his perizonium in it ('the artist's body') and put on a long robe (the flag) bearing the inscription 'the artist's soul'.

We realise that in all his performances, not only the ones mentioned, that the nude or nearly nude artist seemed to touch on two different levels: the political and historical reality of Poland, and the problem of an artist involved in history and responsible for the shape of reality, both of the past and the future — in other words the artist-prophet. His use of national paraphernalia (specifically the colours of the Polish flag) demonstrated his engagement with the history of the country, and the connection to the prominent role of the artist as one who knows the meaning of history and of sacrifice for the sake of future salvation (the restoration of national independence) referred to the Polish romantic tradition. In the nineteenth century, when Poland was occupied by three neighbouring empires (Russian, Prussian and Austrian), many Polish artists (usually poets) created or discovered the meaning of history, prophesying that eventually the sacrifice of the people would bring about salvation, just as Christ's sacrifice resulted in the salvation of humankind. Bereś consciously referred to these grand narratives of Polish culture, using their authority in his confrontation with the usurped

authority of the communists. Hence, the body of the artist was a vehicle of authority confirmed by a metaphysical sense of history, whose end would be salvation. The artist's penis, with its red and white dot, would become a phallus — a symbol of the authority of a genius and prophet, but also that of culture in general. It was the source and historical legitimisation of resistance against communist power. The human body, the main medium of the artist's expression and also the realm of a constructed ideology, paradoxically underwent a kind of 'disembodiment', being at the same time a symbol of authority and, as in mystical Christian tradition, an expression of the 'spirit'. Humiliated and mangled, it died for the 'spirit', for the soul to be reborn. Thus under the circumstances his exposure of his genitals had an exclusively symbolic function — it was a phallus, a sign of authority and spiritual power sanctioned by tradition and by the metaphysical sense of history, as opposed to the par excellence material and usurped authority of the communists.

Tadeusz Kantor

(b. 1915 Wielopde — d. 1990)

fig. 16

Tadeusz Kantor was one of the leading Polish artists of the last sixty years. Internationally he is also one of the best-known Polish artists, particularly in the sphere of theatre rather than as a visual artist. His paintings, object art and happenings were connected to his work in the theatre, both to that presented during World War II as underground theatre, and later, in *Cricot 2*.

It is absolutely impossible to write a comprehensive description of Kantor's artistic activity in a brief essay. It would also be very hard to choose only one or two projects from his rich output. Instead this text includes some very short remarks to illuminate his most important biographical information from the last sixty years.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s following the theatre experiments during the war, Kantor started to make post-surrealist paintings. However, in the mid 1950s he changed his style, working on his famous Informel paintings. The next important change took place at the start of the 1960s, particularly evident in *Popular Exhibition*, Krakow 1962, in which he demonstrated his interest in the presentation of the object (this had also happened earlier in his work in the underground theatre). The 1960s is also the period of Kantor's best-known happenings, which frequently

developed a dialogue with the history of European classical painting: *The Raft of The Medusa* 1967, *The Anatomy Lesson after Rembrandt* 1969, as well as art pieces called *Emballages*. For the first time in 1975, Tadeusz Kantor presented his performance *The Dead Class*. While not his first experience in the Cricot 2 theatre this was one of the most important, accelerating his international career as a theatre artist. In the 1980s he started to make his last series of paintings, called *Nothing Else Beyond*.

Jarosław Kozłowski

(b. 1945 Poznań)

fig. 164

Jarosław Kozłowski is a co-founder and one of the leading artists of the conceptual art movement in Poland in the 1970s. Along with an entire artistic generation he avoided overt political declarations at that time, thereby defending the 'autonomy' of his work. The change in this situation occurred at the turn of the 1980s and is illustrated by Jarosław Kozłowski's work *Personal Files*, first shown at the Archief Gallery in the Hague 1993, then at the National Museum in Poznań (1997). The significance of this work is in its first realisation, i.e. the way it was presented in a gallery, accommodated within the large room of a former archive, in which empty shelves for files had been left, piled up in storeys of scaffolding. Kozłowski used the character of this space, both its former function and the construction of a space subordinated to that function. He placed mechanical alarm clocks, received from various people, onto the empty shelves. These clocks showed their own time (that of their former owners). The sound of ticking from hundreds of clocks (exactly 352 in the Hague, more in Poznań) signalled the individual 'life' and 'personal' time of each of their owners.

However the clocks and their times were confronted with silent quartz chronometers which indicated the so-called 'proper time' of several arbitrary time zones treated as 'objective': Tokyo, Moscow, the Hague, and New York. As a result of such a relativisation of time, an annihilation of universal time took place, or more broadly speaking — of that universal system of language describing reality, understood here as not fitting the individual measure. A measure of time relating to each individual is included in personal files stored in the archives. Any form of standardisation, whether formal (the

construction of a functional object, here an alarm clock), or systemic (time standards for each geographical zone) is a violation of the individuality and singularity of each of the objects. It is the violation against which every object protests, 'ticking' according to its own mode and measure.

Transferring the discussion onto a political level, we might say that Kozłowski's exhibition indicated the relationship between an individual and a system, any system. All power systems use standards (legal, moral, religious, etc.) and impose them on the individual, thereby regulating her or his behaviour and gathering information about that individual in an administrative way. In fact individual behaviour is often (actually always) untypical, different from the abstract standard. Hence, Kozłowski offered criticism of institutions and of the philosophical foundations created by the mechanisms of their administration.

Naturally, such criticism made general references. It pertained to every system, every administration and to each of our attempts to make measurements standard. However, in *European Standards: Polish Version*, exhibited at Potocka Gallery, Krakow in the spring of 1999, Kozłowski rendered the problem more specific with an artwork reflecting the geographically and historically specific situation of Poland in the 1990s. This small exhibition comprised three elements:

- 1 A comforter stretched on the wall, representing isolation, 'soft protection' against the protests which were occurring outside the country.
- 2 A video projection showing a man (in white socks) polishing shoes, which signalled the sham and also the cheapness of the new capitalism.
- 3 Embroidered decorative cloths hanging on the walls, reminiscent of the popular custom in the country of hanging banal proverbs and kitsch pictures (usually in the kitchen).

The point is that instead of such pictures Kozłowski used slogans popular in Poland, referring to the discourses that function here: national, religious, economic, and the so called 'new-speak' relating to systemic, political and economic changes, e.g. 'God, Honour, Homeland', 'Poland for the Poles', 'Solidarity' along with 'Market Economy' and 'Political Correctness', etc. This created a peculiarly idiosyncratic

ideological image of Polish society. It was definitely a critical diagnosis of our society, showing the confusion of national-religious pathos with *nouveau riche* pretence, traditional homespun decorative cloths hanging on the walls with the fear of opening up to the outside world.

Katarzyna Kozyra

(b. 1963 Warsaw)

fig. 207

Katarzyna Kozyra focuses on the subject of the representation of the body. She perceives the body in the relationships between presence and absence, visibility and invisibility, public and private. What exists is visible and public and what is not visible is pushed beyond the sphere of vision into the sphere of non-existence, a private place. The fullest realisation of this thesis are two complementary, but diametrically different works about bathhouses: a women's *Bathhouse* from 1998 and a men's *Bathhouse* from 1999, both of which were exhibited and received awards at the Venice Biennale in 1999. The structure of the two works is relatively simple; each is made with 'candid camera' shots taken in Budapest's public bathhouses (in the latter case the artist appears 'disguised' as a man). The two films retain a certain tension between themselves.

In the first work the film was projected as part of a larger video installation juxtaposing the depicted bodies with representations of female nudes known from art history, beginning with Ingres's *Turkish Bath* and ending with Rembrandt's painting of Susannah. It seems that the artist's intention was to evoke art history and its major works as a mechanism which canonises and standardises the female body, creating a nude and annulling nakedness. The latter is private and invisible, and remains located outside of culture. The former seems to be the essence of culture, a costume, public and visible. We might say that the women's *Bathhouse* encroaches on the very core of the discourse on the representation of the body and touches the dialectics of its presence/absence in the public sphere.

In a phallogentric culture power belongs to the one who looks, who sees (i.e. a man). The one who is looked at (a woman) is subordinated to the male gaze, and develops a dependence on that gaze, subscribing, as Craig Owens has noted, to the 'rhetoric of pose'. Actually, the women being filmed don't pose, but they're not in an absolutely private sphere. The bathhouse is a strictly public institution, although its cultural significance has declined. The women being

filmed realise that they are not being looked at by men (naturally, they don't know they are being secretly observed) — but only by the other women in the bathhouse. This is the fundamental difference.

Therefore the power relationship between watching and posing is eliminated. The bodies of attractive and ugly, young and old women reject the gaze, thus rejecting the culturally encoded power of the eye.

In the men's *Bathhouse* the issue is different since representations of the masculine body in art history have a different status. The body is not objectified in relation to the eye or power, it doesn't serve pleasure, instead it is the carrier of pathos and heroism. The masculine body is either the body of a hero or a martyr, a subject of created history. Even representations of the body of male slaves have a different status to that of female slaves 'posing' for the (masculine) eye. In short, in the example of the male body we face a different type of looking. In the men's *Bathhouse* Kozyra deconstructs the relationship between the body and the mode of representation. The bodies of the men presented aren't pathetic or heroic, they don't present themselves as signs of strength and power. As with the women they're in a public place, the bathhouse, which has, however, lost its character as ascribed by the history of culture. It has become a type of bathroom, a functional place *par excellence*, dedicated to hygiene, and no longer an institution of public life. Such a bathhouse, rendered completely unheroic reduces the masculine and feminine body to the same level, in the process placing an 'equal' sign between the two genders. This suggests an obvious truth: that it is sexual difference — the hierarchy of the sexes — that is encapsulated in modes of representation and that this occurs in culture, not in nature, since nature when it is not represented or depicted means nothing. The point is that the routes leading to this conclusion have seemingly contradictory vectors: the masculine body is deprived of its costume of power; the feminine body undergoes a process of emancipation.

Zofia Kulik

(b. 1947 Warsaw)

fig. 204

Almost from the beginning of her career, Zofia Kulik was involved in political art. Together with Przemysław Kwiek she founded the 'Kwiekulik' art group, showing their performances, films, photo-documentaries, and theoretical works both in Poland

and abroad during the 1970s. In 1973 they established an, 'Actions, Documentation and Propagation Workshop' to collect documentation of both the Polish and foreign neo-avant-garde. Since 1987, however, she has been working on her own, making large photo-tableau series such as *Idioms of the Soc-Ages*, *Inter-National Gothic*, *The Human Motif*, *All the Missiles Are One Missile*, etc.

One of Kulik's most important works, shown for the first time in the National Museum in Poznań in 1999, is a large tableau consisting of over ten thousand small photographs of a TV screen titled *From Siberia to Cyberia*. While this work continued the former series, it also extended it. In the works mentioned above, such as *Idioms of the Soc-Ages*, the artist was interested in the retrospective historical experience of surveillance as inscribed in the language of totalitarianism, militarism, and the hierarchy of gender, for example, the term 'Siberian' is perceived as a metaphor for political oppression. The present work concentrates on the prospective surveillance coming from media culture. Thus, while the first was associated with the Soviet system of the former Eastern Europe, the latter is connected with the approaching Western consumer and infotainment culture: the power of mass media, the utopias of the virtual 'global village', and cyber-space. The question, then, is the following: 'do the phonetic similarities (Siberia = Cyberia) imply any similarity in content?'

Rather than there being a link, Kulik suggests that the TV screen (the symbol of the new surveillance) in fact separates us from the world, particularly as a result of the quantitative explosion of visual information. To use the words of Baudrillard, we actually deal with *simulacrum*, we live in a virtual reality in which death, terror, and war (if we are not physically involved) are confined to a TV screen. Kulik points out that this is a similar *simulacrum* to the language of totalitarian propaganda, the 'Siberian' language of the former totalitarian regime, as shown in her previous work, e.g. in *All the Missiles are One Missile*. Finally, 'Siberia' and 'Cyberia' are two sides of the same coin, both tools of surveillance.

Natalia LL (Lach-Lachowicz)

(b. 1937 Zywiec)

fig. 70

Natalia LL's *Consumer's Art* 1972, is a series of photographs showing the face of an attractive woman

eating a banana or a hot dog in a manner obviously imitating oral sex and suggestive of sexual pleasure experienced without the participation of a man. What's more, contrary to the tradition of gender representation, it is the (invisible) man whose status is reduced to that of a fetish. His fetishisation and deprivation of sexual activity and initiative (he's implicitly the passive provider of sexual pleasure to the woman) — his obvious ironic objectification by means of trivial consumer goods — can be interpreted in the context of feminist theory and politics, largely based on Lacanian psychoanalysis. In its ideological and critical aspect, Natalia LL's art, which undermined the phallogocentric representation of women and men, is certainly revolutionary. Yet paradoxically it is accompanied by theoretical discourses, published almost simultaneously by the artist and concerning the morphology of the photographic image and the concept of art as defined in terms of specific tautologies. Her texts from that period have nothing to do with the gender definition of visual representation or with the subversion of the codes used to represent the female — they have nothing to do with the female at all. In her comments Natalia LL would clearly rather refer to the discursive practices of conceptual art than to feminist theory, particularly those that, in a sense, paradoxically, belong to the formalist tradition of modernist art.

Zbigniew Libera

(b. 1959 Pabianice)

fig. 179

Zbigniew Libera is a paradigmatic artist working within the culture of spectacle that emerged in Poland after 1989 and posing questions about the body in this new Polish reality. After years of a communist deficit in consumer goods, Poland is now striding towards a society of spectacle. Although still rather unrefined, Polish society demonstrates a strong desire to make up for lost time. This makes the country an ideal location in which to operate for those who would wield control not only over our pockets but also our imagination, i.e. the large mass-culture corporations. Libera is interested in the precise interdependence between the business of mass culture and the imagination, the production of aesthetic stereotypes and their repressive impact on an individual; the significance of educational conventions and their ability to blur our sensitivity to terror. Examples are a series of 'corrective devices' (*Body Master. A Set of Toys for Children under 9* 1994,

Universal Penis Expander 1995), also works deconstructing beauty stereotypes (*Ken's Aunt* 1995). Perhaps the most interesting are those works that investigate a specific kind of toy that penetrates the educational systems and shapes our imagination from early childhood (*Delivery Bed for Girls* 1995, *You Can Shave the Baby* 1995, *Lego — Concentration Camp* 1996, *the designs of various tools shaped like handguns* 1997 and *Eroika* 1998) — all analyse the methods used to stereotype our imaginations. According to the artist, we, the clients of the large companies dominate the society of the spectacle, but are unable to break with monotonous behavioural stereotypes. Instead we buy into them with our money and let them manipulate our imagination, which thus becomes a tool of power strategies. Finally we can say that it's impossible to negate the links between educational models operating, among other things, with violence (lead soldiers, toys and gadgets imitating weapons, etc.) that are supported by a consumer culture, and the repressive society which is not only the society of communist totalitarianism but also of consumerist liberalism.

The best-known work by Libera is *Lego — Concentration Camp*. In this the artist shows the profound dangers ensuing from the Moloch-like quality of mass culture. The work is a penetrating comment on the dangers imminent in consumer culture. LEGO blocks, a popular children's toy commonly given as a birthday or Christmas present, can also be used to construct one of the most tragic buildings in the world, the Nazi concentration camp at Auschwitz, a symbol of the Holocaust, the crime against mankind and the Jewish nation. Libera is an artist belonging to the next post-Holocaust generation, who analyses the different situations that arise when Holocaust memory is involved with mass and consumer imagery.

Roman Opałka

(b. 1931 Hocquincourt)

fig. 39

In 1965 Roman Opałka decided to make pictures exclusively based on drawing numbers. In the beginning he made one or two paintings using colour. Very soon, however, Opałka started to use black surfaces and white numbers only, and then introduced a system according to which the background became lighter and lighter, until it too was totally white. The final result was white numbers on a white surface.

In his art, beginning with the 'detail' of *1965/1* and continuing up to his death, Opałka has been painting some numbers every day. He also uses his voice to record the numbers while putting them on canvas. At the end of every session Opałka takes photos of himself, always in the same pose, clothing, and light. His point is that painting is a notation of life, a notation of time, which is at the core of life from one point (i.e. from 1965) until its end. That art (painted numbers, a recorded voice and photographs) is, therefore, parallel to the artist's life, in a sort of tautology. The art is transparent to the artist's life as it grows and grows, according to the system, until the end, which will be one unfinished painting showing one unfinished day — the last one — in the artist's life.

Alina Szapocznikow

(b. 1926 Kalisz — d. 1973 Praz-Coutant)

fig. 52

After producing more or less traditional, modernist sculptures, at the beginning of the 1960s Alina Szapocznikow started to work with the body, particularly with representations of bodily fragments. The fact that she suffered from breast cancer, undergoing medical treatment in the 1960s and early 1970s, no doubt accelerated her interest in this subject. In the beginning her subject matter was a leg or a multiplied face, but during the 1960s this progressed to the *Tumeurs* series, in which fragments of a human body (the artist's) were visible. These were fragments rejected by the doctors but still belonging to a human being. It seems obvious that her art, very personal and connected with her own bodily experience, was a challenge to the phallogocentric, modernist way of seeing. Szapocznikow wasn't interested in conventional representations of the female nude, for consumption by the male voyeur. On the contrary, working with fragments of the female body allowed her to develop her own system of identity, one that recognised and was defined by the body. On the other hand, Szapocznikow can't be compared to contemporary postmodern women artists who also work with their own bodies, frequently showing its deterioration (e.g. Jo Spence or Hannah Wilke), since for Polish artists there have always been problems of form regarding the aesthetic mediation of the personal body. In other words, in Poland, there has always been the problem of the re-presentation of the body and not — as in the case of these contemporary feminist artists — of its presentation in a more or less exhibitionistic way.

Krzysztof Wodiczko

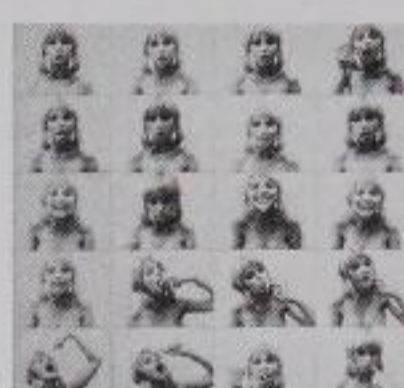
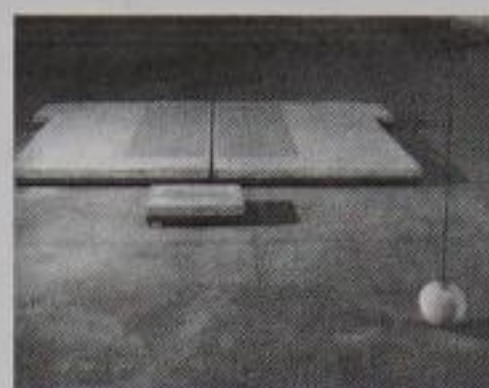
(b. 1943 Warsaw)

fig. 141

Krzysztof Wodiczko left Poland at the end of the 1970s. Although he already had an international reputation, his emigration was the beginning of the critical acclaim of his work. The projections and vehicles he made in the West were rooted in the art he had produced and exhibited while still in Poland, when transposed to a western context those same actions and objects made Wodiczko's career.

This artist's main interest is the problem of power, both in international structures of surveillance, as revealed in one of his first projections in the West, *Grand Army Plaza* (Brooklyn, NYC 1985) and in internal processes of exclusion. The latter was not only the subject of a number of public projections but also works devoted to homeless people — for example, his *Homelessness Vehicles* 1989 or *Police Car* 1991 and those devoted to immigrants — *Alien Staff* 1992–6, *The Mouthpiece* 1993 and its variations 1994–6. Since Wodiczko was himself a city nomad and immigrant, he became deeply involved in art projects that concerned marginalised people in big cities. He is not in fact a so-called 'socially engaged' artist in terms of the nineteenth century tradition, rather he is trying not only to show problems, but also to analyse them. By working with homeless people, immigrants and others, through his instruments and other equipment, he is making a critical analysis of the contemporary world, one of the deepest we can find.

Wodiczko belonged to a small group of only a few artists interested in East-West relations. This experience allowed him to prepare himself to make a critique not only of the 'traditional' countries that were targets for immigration (i.e. the US), but also the 'new' ones. Thus, as an immigrant himself and a person coming from the East, he witnessed the abolition of the 'Iron Curtain,' or — more precisely — the Berlin Wall. Wodiczko's *Leninplatz-Projektion* was presented within the framework of an art action in Berlin in 1990 (*Die Endlichkeit der Freiheit*). Projected onto the Lenin monument in East Berlin was a person apparently coming from the East, visiting the West to buy consumer goods. The work could be seen as a visual and critical symbol of the 'Autumn of the People', a symbol of the consumerism that appeared in Eastern Europe at the beginning of the 1990s.



From left to right and top to bottom:

Mirosław Bałka *2x (190x60x8)* 1994

Jerzy Bereś *Artist's Monument* 1978

Tadeusz Kantor *Amarapura* 1957

Jarosław Kozłowski *Personal Files* 1993

Katarzyna Kozyra *The Women's Bathhouse* 1998

Zofia Kulik *From Siberia to Cyberia* 1999

Natalia LL/Lach-Lachowicz *Consumer Art* 1972

Zbigniew Libera *Lego-Concentration Camp* 1996

Roman Opalka *1965/1-∞* 1965

Alina Szapocznikow *Stela* 1969

Krzysztof Wodiczko *Hirshorn Museum Projection* 1988

Macedonian Art Stories

Suzana Milevska

The first art exhibition in post-World War II Macedonia was organised as early as 1945, right after liberation, and that same year the Artists Association of Macedonia was founded, offering an early sign of Macedonian art activity. In spite of this, the central art system that operated for the next forty-five years of the existence of Yugoslavia never allowed any truly authentic and culturally specific development of Macedonian art. That is to say, all initiatives in new art trends, the selection of artists for international shows, and even the admittance of Macedonian students to the art academies in major Yugoslav cities (before 1980, when the School of Fine Arts was finally established in Skopje), were always influenced by the central art system. The percentage of artists from any constituent republic who were invited or permitted to participate in federal Yugoslav exhibitions and competitions, or even more rarely, to represent Yugoslavia in the wider international art context, depended on the size of the constituent republic.

Of course, such procedural obstacles were closely related to the ideological obstacles emanating from the 'centre', although it should be stressed that Yugoslav artists faced far fewer constraints than did their counterparts in other Eastern European countries during the same period. Socialist realism, and social themes in general, which were present in the years immediately after 1945, especially among the older generation of artists who had already been working in pre-war times (for example, Lazar Ličenoski, Dimitar Pandilov-Avramovski, Nikola Martinoski and Dimo Todorovski) were soon abandoned by the next generation of artists who emerged after the war, during the late 1950s and 1960s. Petar Mazev, Dragutin Avramovski (Gute), Petar Hadži-Boškov, Dimitar Kondovski, Spase Kunovski, Ordan Petlevski, Tomo Šijak, Jordan Grabuloski, and Rodoljub

Anastasov, to mention only a few of the pioneers of modernism, won their place in Macedonian art history thanks to their role in 'rescuing' Macedonian art from the chains of figurative representation and academic realism.

The struggle against ideological constraints had at times a tragic impact on artists, but curiously, some were able to enjoy the highest honours and privileges offered by the governmental authorities without having their convictions about art directly affected. It was as if the communist regime in Macedonia realised that abstraction was more harmless and less susceptible to a social critique than figurative art.

Belonging to a small province that was not of great importance to the Belgrade élite and therefore not closely watched, artists from Macedonia would receive their education in Belgrade, Zagreb or Ljubljana, with some even managing to travel to West European art centres (Paris, of course, was the favorite destination). Returning to Skopje, they would then put into practice the modernist ideas they had studied and embraced, whether these were cubist, surrealist, abstract expressionist, or something else of similar origin.

The closed provincial situation was ideal for producing local cult figures, trends and fashions. It is not difficult, then, to understand how, under such circumstances, the hard-won 'right' to abstraction and experimentation in painting, sculpture, and graphic art could soon become an ideology in itself. The debate that arose in the 1960s as to whether abstract and geometric art could relate to such traditional Macedonian art practices as fresco painting, folk embroidery and carpet-making represented one of the few attempts to forge any links between contemporary art phenomena and inherited cultural art forms. The notion of a complete break with the past and with

tradition was not popular and had to be negotiated: even in the most abstract works, one inevitably detects a 'flirtation' with traditional Macedonian art and culture. Still, needless to say, abstraction won out in the end, dominating Macedonian art right up to the late 1980s.

The Museum of Contemporary Art in Skopje, founded in 1967 in an extraordinary act of solidarity on the part of the international art world following the catastrophic earthquake of 1963, reinforced modernist trends in contemporary art. It consistently displayed artwork by local artists alongside donated works of Picasso, Calder, Hartung and others. It should not be forgotten, however, that in the 1970s, a certain amount of innovative and conceptual art was taking place outside the institutional framework of the museum, for example, Tomo Šijak's interactive assemblage at the Union of Syndicates or Simon Šemov and Nikola Fidanovski's interventions in nature.

It was only when the first generation of artists educated at the Skopje School of Fine Arts started to exhibit in the 1980s, and when they established links with the postmodern rethinking of the figure in German neo-expressionism and the Italian trans-avant-garde, that the reactionary power of modernism became clearer.

Nevertheless, despite often ignorant art institutions and critics, such artists as Aneta Svetieva, Gligor Stefanov, Petre Nikoloski, Bogdan Grabuloski and Violeta Blaževska, Dragan Petković, Aleksandar Stankovski, Bedi Ibrahim, Igor Toševski, Ismet Ramičević, Žaneta Vangeli, Jovan Šumkovski, Blagoja Manevski and Stanko Pavleski gradually changed the understanding of contemporary art by introducing new approaches towards the traditional media of painting and sculpture, or by employing new media such as installation, video art, performance, object art and so on.

Finally, we cannot avoid the fact that what today is usually referred to as 'the Macedonian art scene' actually consists of many more or less talented young artists fighting for a position in the contemporary art world — a task made more difficult by the lack of a clear and distinct art policy among the many institutional 'masters of art power'. Even after the central art system was abandoned, art politics was, unfortunately, left to the ethics, whims, visions and concepts (or lack of concepts) of art directors, curators and managers who were still operating under the influence of the old doctrines. Moreover, the

cliquishness, nepotism, corruption, conflicts of interest, and similar ills that plague societies in transition have also had an effect on the art scene. As a result, even today, more than a decade after gaining independence, Macedonia can hardly be said to have a consistent art policy that impartially determines how important decisions are made for international exhibitions. One can only hope that this bleak situation will improve with the inevitable changing of the old guard of art bureaucrats who replaced the old centralist system with a new procedure known only to them.

Simon Šemov's Variations on Nature and Childhood

fig. 67

From the first appearance of Simon Šemov (b. 1941) on the Macedonian art scene in the early 1960s through to his most recent work, his artistic credo has been characterised by two common threads: an obsession with nature and an underlying open structure of experimental free play. It was the combination of such distinctive concepts that led to the first non-institutional art projects ever created in Macedonia, initiated by Šemov (along with his colleague Nikola Fidanovski) in a kind of extra-institutional escapism. In the period 1973–85, many documented interventions were carried out, both in nature (e.g. at Mount Deshat and Lake Lokuv in Macedonia) and in the cities of Skopje, Prilep and Strumica. These works were presented at an exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Skopje in 1986. From today's perspective, this exhibition is also significant, because of its radically open collaborative aspect: each day the structure of the exhibition changed as a result of site-specific interventions by a large number of invited artists who were asked to participate in the event.

Through his use of colour in nature — applied directly on stones and soil instead of canvas — or in the urban environment as a way of 'attacking the ugly', Šemov was the first Macedonian artist to abandon the dictates of painting, particularly the myth of the crucial importance of abstract expressionism for Macedonian art. It was as if this modernist movement was somehow organically related to Macedonian medieval folk or religious art (a very strange presumption that can be found in critical texts of the time, especially those dealing with Petar Mazev, the leader of the abstract expressionist movement in Macedonia). Moreover, Šemov's alternative art activities were carefully thought out and

conceptualised in texts published in the exhibition catalogue. Were it not for Šemov's projects, executed in the best tradition of environmental art from the late 1960s and 1970s, the history of Macedonian art would be little more than a very dull list of academically categorised art phenomena.

Curiously, art history books and exhibition catalogues reserve even more praise for Šemov's parallel obsession with pop art paintings and silkscreen prints — a phase he went through in the 1970s — these reveal his inclination more for pop art's childlike humour and bright, playful colours than for any Warholesque fascination with consumerism. This, after all, would have been difficult to grasp for an artist born and raised in a socialist regime with its specific economy and production system.

Even so, an interest in pop art's replications with variations and its play with the rules of the game became enduring features of Šemov's aesthetic, especially when he returned to his early interest in nature, ecology and childlike play in a series of installations in the late 1980s. For these works, he collected very rare indigenous herbs and seeds, thus creating various 'herbal topographies' or 'bio-geographical maps' that recalled herbariums. Drawing themes from ethnography, medieval art and ecology, he created many series of works, such as *Meadow* 1985–7, *Ohrid Angel* and *Small Ohrid Angel* 1990–1, *Child Gathering Herbs for an Herbarium* 1990, and later in the 1990s, the two series *Woman* and *House* 1996–2000. His intensive research into herbal handmade paper, combined with an ongoing interest in Slavic mythology, resulted in such complex projects as, *The House of the Sun*, and a plan (yet to be realised) to create edible artworks that would not pollute the environment.

The Epiphany of the Other in Aneta Svetieva's Sculpture

fig. 163

The solo exhibition of Aneta Svetieva (b. 1944) that took place at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Skopje in 1989 offered a very clear indication that something important had happened in contemporary Macedonian sculpture. Svetieva, who had been living and studying in Belgrade for many years, was relatively unknown on the Macedonian art scene prior to the exhibition. Her work presented a unique return to figurative sculpture, making a very specific statement as to how one might represent the human

figure following all the transformations art had gone through in the 1980s.

Educated as both a sculptor and ethnologist, Svetieva exposed her art to archeological and anthropological influences, which left an unmistakable imprint on her style of art and the way she forms her figures. Her interweaving of different cultural codes in representing the female figure and the unusual positions she has given to these leave the viewer with an uneasy feeling of ambivalence.

Such cycles as *River I*, *River II*, *Women Bathers*, and *The High Town*, all 1985–9, which use terracotta as the primary material (and which were sometimes presented in a group as installations), strongly resembled some imaginary archeological site with excavated artefacts of unknown origin, combining elements of Greek, Etruscan and Middle Eastern figurines. Busts of faceless goddesses, painted either in white engobe or used as a background for ornaments, were often placed on a sand-covered floor, or, as in *The High Town*, small architectural-like sculptures were placed on a large, elevated wooden platform that was also covered in sand. This distinctive presentation emphasised the fact that Svetieva was aware not only of the space occupied by her sculptures, but also the space that surrounded them, and so created the kind of vibrant environment Rosalind Krauss has described as 'sculpture in an expanded field'.

The Beauty and the Beast 1994–7, is probably Svetieva's most influential sculptural series (most of these works were exhibited as Macedonia's official entry at the 47th Venice Biennale in 1997). The figures in the series — most of which were made from a combination of cardboard and plaster with metal construction — were presented in pairs that depicted abject intercourse between a woman and a crocodile or some dragon-like creature, presenting us with powerful and horrific images of some taboo affair. Such encounters with the strange and unknown, with radical cultural or gender differences, produce a gap between representation and narrative in Svetieva's work. The narrative is deliberately circumvented, but the power of the image remains, creating the necessary links and evoking conflicts in our cultural and gender identities. We see this especially in *Turkish Bath* 1994, which features a red metal mesh sculpture of a woman riding on top of a green 'beast'. The installation alludes to stories about peeping through a hole in a bathhouse wall; the sense of fear we feel from the gaze of the 'Other' is underscored here by the repetitive,

rhythmic sound of wooden nalans (a kind of sandal) that provides an audio background for the video animation that accompanies the sculpture.

The Objects and Words of Igor Toševski

fig. 229

The first project undertaken by the artist Igor Toševski (b. 1963) was a performance called *A Day in a Teashop*. Performed in June 1986 and documented on video, the work consisted of the artist creating a site-specific wall assemblage at the Turkish teashop Gallery 7 in Skopje. Toševski's statement was clear: he was circumventing painting, the most common medium of Macedonian artists of his generation. Toševski was able to make this courageous step thanks primarily to his education at the Helsinki Art Academy, his participation in the activities of the Macedonian alternative art group Zero, and influences from pop art and conceptual art (which also resulted in his early involvement with comic strips in the 1980s, working as one of the first non-commercial comic strip artists in Macedonia).

A later project, *Dislocations* (at the Cultural Information Centre in Skopje, 1997), made reference to the artist's long-term obsession with collecting things. Here, Toševski exhibited a kind of photo-diary of the process of transferring objects from one container to another — the exhibited container stood there as a vehicle of content and meaning.

Dossier '96 was Toševski's most carefully conceived project. Designed as social and economic research on the conditions and regulations of privatisation — which was, and still is, the hottest political issue in Macedonia — the project required him to travel to various cities, visiting factories that had applied for privatisation. The piles of rejected, 'faulty' ready-made objects he saw on the premises of these factories — a guise of bankruptcy invented by managers who hoped that if the factories looked less productive and less profitable they could purchase them from the state at cut-rate prices — were represented in the project by only a few examples; instead, he filled the gallery space with words. Definitions from an economics dictionary, projected and multiplied all over the gallery, explained such terms as 'transitions', 'privatisation' and 'bankruptcy'. These are still such crucial issues in many East European countries.

As a natural continuation of such concerns, Toševski's most recent work involving collections of objects is *Perfect Balance — 23 Kilos of Human Rights*

2001, which deals with the bureaucratisation of human rights issues in international institutions. For the installation, the artist exhibited folders from his father, a well-known expert on human rights protection who served on the United Nations Committee for Human Rights, Vanished Persons and Victims of Torture. Toševski placed the folders on seven antique scales suspended from the gallery ceiling, thus creating a very delicate balance that could easily be upset by the movements of visitors or by air currents. How can one estimate, how can one measure the appropriate number of laws, documents, records, etc., needed to guarantee human rights, and who should be delegated to ensure this balance? These were the inescapable questions posed by the project.

The Zero Group and Postmodernism in Macedonia

fig. 149

The Zero group was formed in the mid-1980s more from pragmatic and social concerns than for any artistic reason. The strict regulations of Skopje's School of Fine Arts prevented students from exhibiting work so several older artists were inspired to invent an umbrella group that would allow them to exhibit with some of their artist friends who were still students. And indeed, from such anti-institutional beginnings, when these artists circumvented the rules and presented their work at the group show *Expression, Gesture, Action* (curated by Vladimir Veličkovski at the Museum of Macedonia, Skopje 1985), right through to their final activities in 1993, art institutions have, at best, been ambivalent about the Zero group.

Although the group was often invited to participate in public events and programmes, it was not taken very seriously — or supported professionally and financially — by the main Macedonian institutions of contemporary art. Perhaps the best illustration of the group's 'place' in Macedonian art history is provided by their performance at the Museum of the Contemporary Art in Skopje in 1986, which was organised on the occasion of an exhibition of work by Simon Šemov and Nikola Fidanovski. The event was conceived as a way of transforming the ambience of the museum's atrium — a location that was, simultaneously, both inside and outside the institution. Visitors were able to watch the artists painting, creating installations, or simply playing around to the sound of music, as if they were exotic specimens captured in a large glass showcase. The

group's postmodern irony, involving the deconstruction of genres, media, reason and logic (some of the members were even involved in alternative spiritual or mystic movements), as well as of the rational Western conception of art, was symbolised by the in-between space inhabited by the Zero artists.

The fact that Zero's structure was very heterogeneous and not based on any manifesto or art programme obviously contributed to the art world's ambivalent attitude to the group and the lack of any art historical acknowledgment of its activities. Any interested person who shared similar ideas about art could participate in Zero; it did not really matter what sort of work one did. Such informality very much resembles the way Fluxus functioned (though interestingly, the Macedonian artists never mentioned the German group known as 'Zero').

Zero's activities were primarily concentrated around such public events as mural painting, happenings, or performances, and took place either during summer festivals in various cities (for example, Skopje and Štip) or anonymously and unannounced in front of the group's favourite meeting place, the teashop Gallery 7 in Skopje's Turkish market. The murals were usually executed as collaborative works, although from the beginning, the members who most frequently exhibited (Aleksandar Stankovski, Perica Georgiev, Igor Toševski, Bedi Ibrahim, Siniša Cvetkovski, Tatjana Miljovska and Miodrag Desovski) had already developed distinct and recognisable styles.

This was even more evident in such exhibitions as *Zero Shakti* (Museum of Macedonia, Skopje 1990, with Stankovski, Georgiev, Toševski, Desovski and z. Trajkovski participating) or *Standpunkt: Mazedonien Group Zero* (IGNIS — Ostereuropäisches Kultur und Bildungszentrum, Cologne 1990), when each participant was represented individually by a distinctive painting, sculpture, installation or video. It was hardly surprising, then, that after the exhibition *Chaos/Order* (Museum of the City of Skopje 1993, with Stankovski, Trajkovski, Georgiev, ž. Vangeli, i. Ramičević and s. Milevska participating), most members decided to go their separate ways following their own art careers.

Aleksandar Stankovski on History, Geography, Politics and Religion

fig. 155

The first major solo exhibition of work by Aleksandar Stankovski (b. 1959) in Skopje was held in 1997 —

twenty-two years after his first solo presentation following his graduation from the Skopje School of Fine Arts. Although Stankovski had long been active in public art, with murals, performances, site-specific public installations and video (he was one of the leaders of the Zero group during the late 1980s and early 1990s), as well as exhibiting in similar public events in Germany, it was not until he exhibited his series of ten works on the theme of the *Last Supper* that he received any acknowledgment from the Macedonian art establishment.

This delay in recognition can be easily explained: dominated by painting, sculpture, and graphics, the art scene in Macedonia found it difficult to accept alternative media, such as installation, video art, happenings, etc., all of which Stankovski had previously been exploring and introducing to the local art scene. But even his exhibition of collages, painting over photographs and oil paintings in 1997 — which, in addition to the *Last Supper* series also included a group of humorous and cynical portraits of Hitler — was hard to grasp. Though employing more conventional media, this work was still controversial, making history ironic by parodying the Yugoslav past (for example, the portrait *Hitler with a Pig's Head* 1992, referred to an anecdote taught in school about the early life of Josip Broz-Tito) as well as alluding to the ideological issues burdening religious themes. While demystifying the figure of Jesus at the Last Supper — personifying him as the artist Albrecht Dürer or, even more blasphemously, as a female art critic, Suzana Milevska — at the same time Stankovski made it possible for a surprising return to narrative in art to take place. For so long this had been avoided by Macedonian artists seduced by the modernist discourse of abstract expressionism. Stankovski's very real interest in the manipulation of history and geographical myths is most thoroughly evident in his *Portrait of a Citizen from FYROM* (installation with ink-jet prints, drawings and two television monitors 1998), which includes historical maps of such 'imaginary' states as Greater Albania, Greater Serbia and Greater Bulgaria originating in countries with persistent hegemonic aspirations towards Macedonian territory.

Nevertheless, Stankovski's artistic imagination is at its most provocative in his video and film experiments, where his hybrid, collage poetics venture far from politically correct themes and interpretations of reality. He is most stimulated by the possibilities

available through computer animation and image distortion, as well as by the potential of video as a medium for imaginative games in which the narrative may be based on local political issues or more general problems. Examples include *Kokino* (video, 93 min 1992, with D. Abjanić and Z. Trajkovski) and *Maklabas* (video transferred onto 35 mm film, 117 min 1999).

Žaneta Vangeli's Call for Redemption

fig. 214

The fundamental concepts in the art of Žaneta Vangeli (b. 1963) have been primarily shaped by the idea of continual interference between the sacred and the profane and between historical and mystical notions of time and space. Vangeli's career developed over a long period both in Macedonia and Germany, so it is no accident that she is concerned with the differences between the traditions inherited and incorporated in Western and Eastern cultures.

Throughout her artistic career, Vangeli has used media that is well established in contemporary Western art practice, such as photography, installation, video, and ready-made objects; her early videos and video installations were of particular importance in the development of new media in Macedonia. But the content of her work is usually related to the ideas of Byzantine theologians and aestheticians (for example, the negative theology of Dionysius the Areopagite) or to twentieth-century interpreters of Byzantine thought (such as Florensky, Uspensky and Lossky), so that the media are used in very unexpected ways.

Instead of a linear belief in tragic destiny or the simple notion of historical changes as natural processes, Vangeli offers Christian redemption as a kind of deconstruction of ontological resentment. The linear understanding of the flow of time as a necessary historical development in a hierarchical sense is confronted by the liturgical concept of time, which does not recognise human destiny or tragedy because it views redemption as eternal liberation. It is important to emphasise that such highly conceptualised problems are sometimes intertwined with a very urgent agenda taken from the political and social context of the country, as in the works *Social Sculpture of Macedonia* 1996 and *The Constant Desire for Eternity* 1997, both created for the group show *Liquor Amni I and II*. In these installations the artist tried to grasp the full complexity of contemporary Macedonian society: issues surrounding the

acceptance of the country's official state insignia (as is well known, objections from Greek authorities led Macedonia to change its official name, coat of arms and flag), its unrecognised church, and governmental involvement in drug trafficking, on the one hand, and, on the other, globalisation offered as a preserver of life.

A similar reflection on the incompatibility of contrasting cultural heritages and conceptions of time, space and power — and on the resulting irony when such heterogeneous concepts are juxtaposed — is even more fully explored in the installation *Culturalism, or On the Ontological Failure of Tragedy* 1999, especially where she exhibits Macedonian 1,000 and 500 denar banknotes as ready-mades. The irony of using both the image of the Mother of God (based on a famous icon) and the image of a poppy (a symbol of drugs) on Macedonian currency shows the government's insensitivity to the power and meaning of these images. Similar paradoxes can also be found in Vangeli's video work (*Gate* 1992, *The Temptation of St. Anthony* 1993, *Bongo, or Homage to Machiavelli* 1994, *A Documentary About Vladimir Antonov* 1995 and *Nightary* 1997), as well as in her latest film, *Judge* 2001, in which she finds an even more appropriate mode of expression for her interest in the contradictions and controversies that define human existence and its redemption.

Family, History and Self — Slavica Janešlieva's Stories

fig. 232

The young artist Slavica Janešlieva (b. 1973) appeared on the Macedonian art scene with a distinct interest in uncovering events from her own personal experience, as well as from her family's history, and showing how these private stories have been interrupted by the more general history and culture of the region. Curiously, this 'double agenda' in content is usually presented through a 'double agenda' in her choice of media. That is to say, she enjoys using a combination of objects, installations, videos and ink-jet prints, but she also applies her skills for more conventional forms of printmaking (aquatints, woodcuts, etc.), which emphasise the historic, post-nostalgic dimensions of her work.

The installation *Genealogical Tree* 1997, consisting of fourteen kitchen cutting boards printed with aquatint images of Catholic nuns — her aunts — and suspended from the gallery ceiling, referred to the chosen celibacy of her female relatives, which meant

'cutting off' branches of the family tree. Thus, from the very beginning of her career, Janešlieva appeared as one of the rare Macedonian female artists directly concerned with questions of gender, motherhood, authority, religion and identity.

A more radical project was *V.A.M. (Voyeurs' Association of Macedonia)* 1999, which was part of the group exhibition *The First Peep Show in the City* at Skopje's CIX Gallery. Here Janešlieva invented an association of citizens that served to 'legitimise' the habit of peeping at couples who make love in public places because they cannot control their passions. Janešlieva's concern with the undefined borders between public and private, communal and intimate, social and personal — already fully evident in the humorous *V.A.M.* project — found even fuller expression in her major solo project *Storytelling* 2000–1, in which she compiled various stories and anecdotes from the lives of her ancestors. For example, one segment of this project, called *Love and Interest* 2000, was based on a story from the life of her grandfather, who lost his inheritance because he married for love instead of making a traditional arranged marriage. Janešlieva's primary source for her narrative material, as well as for the way she structured it as art, was the ritual storytelling that took place during her family's holiday celebrations — a traditional form of mediating the past. Thus, the historical and cultural circumstances of the Balkan Wars, poverty, religious devotion, cultural rituals and the way that personal memory is intertwined with these, became basic motivations for Janešlieva's 'reader'. In order to underscore the importance of memory, confession and the creation of national and personal identity through storytelling in her work, Janešlieva collected these tales in a small book that accompanied the project, in a way reminiscent of a nineteenth-century ethnographer or contemporary anthropologist.

Tomo Šijak's *Musandras* as an Urban Metaphor for Memory

fig. 95

The series of works called *Musandras* or *Neomusandras*, which Tomo Šijak (b. 1930 — d. 1999) created and exhibited during the 1960s and 1970s (the earliest one dates from 1967), may be considered the first urban art objects with a conceptual and contextual background ever conceived in Macedonia. Although there were other interesting three-dimensional paintings/objects

created in the 1960s by Dimitar Kondovski, and by Šijak himself, which were influenced by the Eastern Orthodox iconostasis and which were made, for the most part, in the form of abstract icons or triptychs, Šijak's series of 'musandras' were unique in Macedonian art. Named after the cupboard-like wall shelving that was a common furnishing in nineteenth century Macedonian houses and which can still be found in older houses, Šijak's musandras combined an awareness of local cultural heritage with the most striking inventions of the 1960s and, especially, the heightened interest in extraterrestrial life following the first moon landing. While memorialising the past, they also anticipated the future.

The new designs, materials and objects that inspired the artist to explore the spatial expansion of conventional, two-dimensional painting also led him to more extravagant themes and content. His objects were originally conceived as three-dimensional constructions made of several layers of variously painted glass, sometimes including mirrors or other elements, or even fitted with sound-emitting transistors; in this way, the objects continued to refer to icons but with noticeable differences introduced by the artist. In contrast to the icon's religious aspect, Šijak's objects were urban metaphors that dealt with the need for the aesthetisation of everyday life and conveyed both aesthetic and scientific messages. Titles such as *Musandra with Emission of 8652 mgh*, *Musandra with Emission of Unknown Waves*, *Musandra Spiritual*, *Musandra of the Galaxy 452*, and *Musandra Cosmogony*, all 1968, obviously referred to mankind's obsession with discovering new civilisations and realities, which was expected to take place soon after the first steps on the moon.

These objects, which are usually interpreted historically as neo-avant-garde works with a Dada and surrealist resonance, were presented at the Bienal de São Paulo in 1969 — a rare presentation of work by a contemporary Macedonian artist in the international art context.

Much later in his life and just a few years before his death, Šijak created an exhibition entitled *Why? Because!* (The Museum of the City of Skopje, 1996), in which he showed himself to be much more sceptical about finding answers or discovering truth. He presented fragmentary objects with painted portraits of his family, as if it were no longer possible to maintain even the ironic belief in cosmic truths that one could detect in his early works and poetic system.

The broken frames were also a very distant, but plausible reference to the deconstruction of painting, which had been a main concern of Šijak's art from the very beginning of his career. Thus, even at the end of his life, Šijak remained true to his reputation as one of the first and very rare experimental figures in the recent history of Macedonian art.



From left to right and top to bottom:

- Simon Šemov, N. Fidanovski *A Totem* 1973
 Aneta Svetieva *Turkish Bath* 1994
 Igor Toševski *Perfect Balance — 23 Kilos of Human Rights* 2000
 Zero Group *Painting a Street Mural* 1990
 Aleksandar Stankovski *The Last Supper in Gallery 7* 1990
 Žaneta Vangeli *Culturalism, or About the Ontological Failure of the Tragedy* 1999
 Slavica Janešlieva *Love and Interest* 2000
 Tomo Šijak *Neomusandra* 1977

Romania

Călin Dan

George Apostu

(b. 1934 Bacau — d. 1986 Paris)

fig. 42

Apostu stormed onto the Romanian art scene in the mid-1960s with the kind of radical approach that actually belongs to a later period in twentieth century art. He quickly devised and applied a minimal set of procedures, focusing on a limited number of subjects that defined him as a 'brand' some three decades before such artistic strategies generally came into play. But Apostu understood where to look for the recipe for success: some forty years earlier, Brancusi was doing the same thing as he pursued a career based on a streamlined set of gestures and protocols.

The young Apostu reconfigured the legacy of his predecessor, opening it up to further interpretations and recontextualisations by developing morphological solutions derived from the master's principle of 'direct cut' and applying them on a monumental scale. His series *Tata si fiu* (*Father and Son*) 1965, which harks back to both funereal sculpture and public votive monuments developed in peasant culture, made him deservedly famous. With such works as *Fluturi* (*Butterflies*) 1966 and *Lapone* (*Lapp Women*) 1973, Apostu took the morphology Brancusi had derived from Romanian peasant woodcraft further into the realm of raw aesthetics while staying attuned to the international trends of the 1960s and 70s. This is particularly evident in the development of large open-air sculptural environments where art and natural forms co-exist, influencing our perception of both.

Horia Bernea

(b. 1938 Bucharest — d. 2000 Paris)

fig. 65

Horia Bernea was a painter who was also open to other media. He crossed the borders of his craft

to work in performance, object art and later, graphic design and video. Having mastered the sensual manipulation of his material while constantly underpinning his skills with a zest for lyrical conceptualism, Bernea occupied a dominant position on the Romanian art scene for more than thirty years. Here his high visual mobility and easy play with abstract speculation earned him undisputed respect along with a recognition that extended well beyond the circles of art specialists and aficionados.

The work of Bernea developed through recurrent methods, with several themes being explored in exhaustive series only to re-emerge years later in other forms and with other solutions. During the 1960s and early 1970s, Bernea tried out several visual formats for hosting his repertoire of ideas, including free abstraction, geometric abstraction, conceptualism and lyrical expressionism; what united this multifaceted research was the artist's inquisitive attitude, his playful yet unsparing manner of pushing the limits of painting as a medium, a cultural domain and a vehicle for ideology.

Bernea had a chameleon-like capacity for empathising with various types of painterly discourse so long as they remained within the borders of sensuality. Francis Bacon and Willem de Kooning come to mind as models, along with more surprising influences such as Ingres or the painters of the Barbizon school. In this sense one could say that Bernea was postmodern, a highly intuitive commentator on the crisis of the visual realm, although he lacked the cynical pessimism typical of mainstream postmodernism.

In this regard, the series *Deal (Hill)* 1972 onwards, an 'observation' series of large-format paintings that mark the changes across the seasons in

the vegetation on a hill in Transylvania, is a hallmark of his career. In the *Deal* series, Bernea developed his own brilliant version of *Mont Sainte-Victoire*, ideally positioning himself for a confrontation of forms and ideas — a position that unfortunately later gave way to a less inspired obsession with Eastern Orthodox discourse.

Ștefan Bertalan

(b. 1930 Hunedoara county. Lives and works in Ohringen, Germany.)

fig. 123

Operating on the border between esoteric and scientific curiosity, Ștefan Bertalan combines visual interpretations of natural phenomena with a life tuned to cosmic energies radically divorced from the mundane. Some of his more productive years were spent in the higher education system. He left a strong mark on students at the Architecture Institute in Timisoara, introducing them to challenging forms of discourse, to uninhibited ways of analyzing dynamic structures of growth, and to comparisons between natural and manmade shapes. In the 1980s, Bertalan gradually withdrew from public life, although he continued to exert a persistent influence on freethinking intellectuals (primarily but not exclusively artists) from the seclusion of his studio, without, however, creating any strong visual presence. His main work was his own existence, which he was constantly reconstructing and scrutinizing, especially his own spiritual growth through the active contemplation of nature, and his tactical evasion of the political and economic oppression taking place in Romania. Cultivation of his garden and talking to his sunflowers were accompanied by close observation of this segment of nature using photography, and the systematic documentation of his daily routine in an extensive diary packed with drawings.

Bertalan was not a political dissident, but rather a dissident from the reality we all experience as social conformists. His non-conformity increased over the years until he reached a state of total silence. With a body of work that functions primarily through the presence of the artist himself, Bertalan was an inspirational figure for the Romanian art scene but in ways that are so complex and elusive that it is sometimes difficult to retrieve them for art history.

Sorin Dumitrescu

(b. 1946 Bucharest. Lives and works in Bucharest.)

fig. 111

Sorin Dumitrescu's fame rests on a loquacious and complex personality in which a baroque appetite for cultural information and a fascination with the rhetoric thread in the history of literature (from medieval religious writings to the postmodern poetry of the 1980s) have been competing with an inclination for building abstract spaces of meditation and silence.

As a second-generation conceptualist, he elaborated and then presented to younger audiences an appealing way of envisioning a relationship with text and literary discourse, while manufacturing a personal version of religious iconography based on abstract innuendo. Spiritual, elegant and decadent, with a strong decorative component, his drawings and installations, many bearing generic titles like *Semn* (*Sign*) or *Obiect* (*Object*), established a pattern of communication between, on the one hand, literary, philosophical and theological concepts and, on the other, gestures that leave nothing behind but which are sensual and purely visual forms. The books *Epica Magna* 1978 and *Operele Imperfecte* (*The Imperfect Works*) 1979, both created in collaboration with the poet Nichita Stănescu (a genuine hero in the literary circles of the 1970s and early 1980s) will survive as an inspired and daring exploration of the difficult border between the cognitive and intuitive aspects of language — a problem that has been at the forefront of cultural thought from Paul Valéry to Umberto Eco.

Unfortunately Dumitrescu's capacity for invention quickly dimmed, eventually giving way to an obsession with Eastern Orthodox dogma. After 1990, when religion became the token ideology that replaced communism, the artist translated this obsession into feeble replicas of Russian Byzantine icons, paralleling the manufacturing approach with a persistent activism where awareness of the cultural significance of a certain traditionalist trend is undermined by an extremist tone tinted with nationalist clichés.

Ion Grigorescu

(b. 1945 Bucharest. Lives and works in Bucharest.)

fig. 86

Ion Grigorescu's intellectual radicalism, expressed in lonely performances delivered for the camera, assumes its unique power thanks to the extraordinary cultural

sophistication that lies beneath the very crude images of (simulated) self-mutilation and auto-erotic sex. Although derived from the same sources, his paintings and photographs are more concerned with making surprising cultural associations; they radiate an atmosphere that recalls old documents for an anthropological study of some alien culture. The films he made in the 1970s, which for the most part were shown only at private gatherings, rendered him ideologically suspect to the authorities. This led to a long period of (self-)banishment from public life and a hiatus in his artistic career from the early 1980s to 1990. Subsequently, for international curators visiting Romania after the fall of the communist regime, he became the embodiment of the intellectual who survived on the margins of oppression and managed to document this unique experience in a most suggestive way.

Combining a poverty of materials, technological improvisation, subliminal cynicism, religious humility and free mythological associative thinking, for more than three decades Grigorescu has constructed an image of the human condition under political oppression that has now become virtually paradigmatic. His artistic discourse appeals to a wide audience due to a vocabulary developed on the border between pop art and Arte Povera, along with a touch of mysticism (unfortunately, somewhat heavy at times). Mixing minimal gestures to good effect and making modest media choices, he is always interested in the mythology of everyday man, a character he himself brilliantly personifies. A precise stylistic touch, one that employs poverty, ugliness and decay, as vehicles for deeper feelings of redemption, makes his eclectic works highly efficient as a form of both emotional and conceptual communication.

Wanda Mihuleac

(b. 1946 Bucharest. Lives and works in Paris.)

fig. 152

Wanda Mihuleac made the transition from the first to the second generation of Romanian conceptualists by working her way through several topical themes. She also shifted back and forth between old and new techniques and media, from printing, sculpture and artist books to photography, film, video, performance and installation.

Through both her art practice and her curatorial initiatives which include *Scrierea (The Writing)* 1980, *Spatiul Obiect (The Object Space)* 1982, *Spatiul Oglinda*

(*The Mirror Space*) 1986, Mihuleac played a considerable role in promoting theoretical trends (mostly in the field of semiotics) and media that were new to visual culture in Romania; in this way she became one of the most active mentors for the generation of artists that appeared on the local scene in the 1980s. Of paramount importance, too, especially in expanding the thematic range of Romanian art, was her on-going work with the concept of the female body, which she perceived as an endless source of visual metaphor and experimentation, often pursued with the means of optical illusions.

Mihuleac's artistic strategy involved the continual repositioning of herself through various media with regard to such age-old topics as the body as landscape, landscape as a container of concepts and the intersection of these two notions with utopian architecture. Her capacity to collaborate with all kinds of specialists (choreographers, dancers, composers, video makers, architects, writers) in order to develop ideas and content for mixed media events helped establish an entrepreneurial model that only a decade later became widespread in Romanian art practice. In all her work Mihuleac pursued an aesthetic obsession with the love of beauty, in which everyday reality is forced into symbolic relationships. The result is the construction of dense and colorful worlds saturated with literary metaphor and at times flavored with a touch of kitsch.

Paul Neagu

(b. 1938 Bucharest — d. 2004 London)

fig. 82

With his *Cake Man* series (1971), Paul Neagu established a set of analytical procedures for dealing with the human figure as a space and with space as an object. Indeed, for a period of about two decades, his methodology exerted a significant influence on the development of Romanian sculpture. Neagu's vision of the universe is technological, analytical and monumental. His human figures are a recontextualisation of the Egyptian ritual of fertility (the yearly disembodiment of Osiris), combined with echoes from the pre-robotic myth of the Golem from Prague.

Later, Neagu's *Hyphen* series (1975 onwards) engineered a universe of expectations, with shapes lying on the ground, predominantly horizontal yet

curved by inner tension and external stimuli, like predators watching for prey. Actually Neagu is not so much a sculptor as a draftsman of frozen animations; his works in steel are more about contour than volume, and share with his performances the same type of emotion. They are elegant, cold, distant and highly intelligent.

When Neagu left Romania for a life in exile, his decision was made not primarily for political or economic reasons, but rather out of spiritual and cultural motives: his anti-sentimental view of art and existence needed to develop elsewhere, away from a society steeped in nostalgia and emotional attitudes about tradition and the natural landscape. Neagu's art is anti-natural and anti-traditional in its structure, and therefore has its own naturalness, one that is noncommittal and rather discreet. His work represents one of the most accomplished developments we have of the visual legacy of Marcel Duchamp. Neagu's *Hyphens* are actually a distilled version of Duchamp's 'malic molds' from *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (1915–23). In Neagu's case, art is a set of designed products suspended in subtle desperation between a lost functionality and an impossible freedom.

Sigma Group

Ștefan Bertalan (b. 1930 Hunedoara county. Lives and works in Ohringen, Germany.) **Constatin Flondor** (b. 1936 Cernauti. Lives and works in Timisoara.) and **Doru Tulcan** (b. 1943 Cladova. Lives and works in Timisoara.)

fig. 62

The meteoric brevity of the Sigma group's existence (1970–8, with Ion Gaita, Elisei Rusu, Florin Codreanu participating until 1974) was compensated for by its extremely fruitful activity at a time when visual culture in Romania was blossoming due to an ideological relaxation. Remarkably, Sigma emerged in Timisoara, far from the centre of artistic activity in Bucharest. Moreover, the group's members (Ștefan Bertalan, Constatin Flondor, Doru Tulcan) were able to take advantage not only of collaborative work strategies, but also of the strong social environment they found at the School of Art where they taught. As a result, Sigma was not just another gathering of individuals, but a phenomenon that survived the group itself, precisely because of a complex strategy where educational practice, public interventions and

the initiation of multimedia projects (*Eventual Inflatable Structures/Balloons and Children* 1974, *Multivision I–II* 1978) were closely intertwined.

In its groundbreaking approach, Sigma succeeded in establishing a new sensibility in Romania with regard to the relationship between the industrial object, natural elements and the human body, as well as implicitly extending the concept of art beyond the cultural limitations that had been imposed on it. In a way that was indicative of the restrictions artists faced in a country where modernism held no strong position, Sigma members developed a discourse based on an unusual combination of the theoretical and spiritual principles of the Bauhaus movement and the free experimental work of the organicist/utopian avant-garde architects active in the 1960s in Western Europe. While the pedagogical strategies adopted by the group during its brief existence belonged to the 1920s, its artistic practices conveyed the lightness, joyfulness and free spirit manifest in the utopian designs of Hans Hollein, Archigram and Coop Himmelb(l)au.

subREAL

(est. 1990 by Călin Dan and Dan Mihaltianu; Iosif Király joined in 1991. Mihaltianu left subREAL in 1993), **Călin Dan** (b. 1955 Arad. Lives and works in Amsterdam.), **Iosif Király** (b. 1957 Resita. Lives and works in Bucharest.), **Dan Mihaltianu** (b. 1954 Bucharest. Lives and works in Berlin.)

fig. 234

In 1995, after five years of tactical work, in which they were engaged first in psychoanalysing their experiences under totalitarianism and then investigating the mass-media perception of Romania as a sort of theme park (in a series of installation works/environments titled *Draculaland* and made between 1993 and 1995) subREAL began to work on an archive of photographic art reproductions chaotically shaped around *Arta*, the only art magazine that existed in Romania between 1953 and 1993.

The resulting project, *Art History Archive* (or A.H.A.), developed successfully over a period of three years from 1995 to 1997, when it gave birth to a spin-off project, *Serving Art*, based on the same source material. Both projects, each carried out over several years, dealt with such topics as the mass distribution of art via reproductive procedures; authorship in old and new media; and the archive as a creative or oppressive strategy.

Following a path that now seems logical and consistent but which was probably the result of spontaneous research processes in and around the art world, the group took a third step in the same direction with the project *Interviewing the Cities* (1999 onwards). In addition to drawing inspiration from the formal structures of the two earlier projects, this set up a relation between photography, performance and optical illusion, so as to construct a new approach to art history.

Although uncharacteristic in the context of Romanian visual culture in the late twentieth century, subREAL did not emerge from nowhere but developed by applying the lessons its members learned in the underground art scene of the 1980s. Despite this aspect of continuity, the economic and ideological struggles that defined Romania in the 1990s meant that subREAL worked primarily outside of the country until 2000. The local scene accepted the group only recently, when a paradigmatic shift introduced by the globalization of themes and ideas resulted in a new generation of artists more attuned to subREAL's dry humor and irony.

Marian Zidaru

(b. 1956 Craiova. Lives and works in Bucharest and Pucioasa.)

fig. 145

In formal terms, Zidaru is a sculptor who stages installations in which playful shapes are presented in dialogue with aggressive, dramatic, large-scale black-and-white drawings. But this visually impressive work should not be divorced from its socio-theological concerns: in the mid-1980s, Zidaru and his wife Victoria (the couple work together as artists, in the manner of Christo and Jean-Claude) retired from Bucharest to the little spa town of Pucioasa, where the life and sufferings of a religious mystic named Veronica have generated an underground religious movement deeply rooted in the community. After moving to Pucioasa, Zidaru developed the Manichaean style he still uses today, and became involved in the affairs of the town. In 1990 when religion began to replace communism as the officially sanctioned national ideology, it became possible for Zidaru and his wife to create their work in public — on stage, in exhibitions, in amateur theatrical performances, in publications, etc. An interesting economy surrounds the activities of the couple, who

do not claim authorship of their work. Instead they employ (through barter) the residents of Pucioasa to execute their designs for wooden sculptures, furniture and clothing, and also to take part in public performances. The revenue from this business, which is successful both locally and internationally, is said to return to the community. Meanwhile, a monastery has been built in Pucioasa to accommodate the followers of Veronica (although the Romanian Orthodox Church has not yet officially recognized Veronica as a martyr). The woodwork in the pilgrimage church was designed by Zidaru.

Internationally, Marian Zidaru represents a typical case of the vagaries of contextualization. Owing to its suspicious ideological extremism, his art appears marginal. But it is this extremism that makes it appealing to a public who might find something exotic in his mix of daring modernity and muddy archaism, while largely ignoring the social and cultural realities that underlie his work. In Romania, the representational function of Zidaru's art operates differently, since his work is just one of the many guises adopted by religious movements, whether schismatic or official, in a poor country that is struggling to understand its position in the world. While progressive intellectuals usually ignore or reject Zidaru, he continues to flourish as an example of an artist who has found his public and enjoys its recognition.

Teodor Graur

(b. 1953 Pogaceaua / Mures, Romania. Lives and works in Bucharest.)

fig. 240

In the 1980s, Teodor Graur developed a discourse that confronted the unwritten rules of political censorship in a strange but effective way. At the height of the dictatorial oppression by Ceaușescu's regime, Graur methodically addressed all the most sensitive issues of the time (such as poverty, the lack of the most basic supplies, the demolition of old Bucharest, the growth of an aggressive proletarian subculture, isolation from the outside world) with an impersonal objectivity that nonetheless displayed very clear personal commitment. Graur photographed the desolate ruins of hospitals, schools and public baths before their destruction by bulldozers. He collected old photographs and scraps of documentation at the Forensic Institute (which was also destroyed). He tirelessly monitored and

photographically documented the black-and-white television transmissions of political parades and propaganda events. These materials were all recycled in installations in which paintings and photographs borrowed from each other. At a time when very painterly styles of working (mostly with Christian or mystical allusions) were dominant, Graur created monumental still lifes of graphic dryness (a favourite motif was meat — an obsessive object of desire for the starving population) and portraits of heroic ugliness. Meanwhile, his photographs were coloured with a blue tone and an ambiguity that brought them closer to painting.

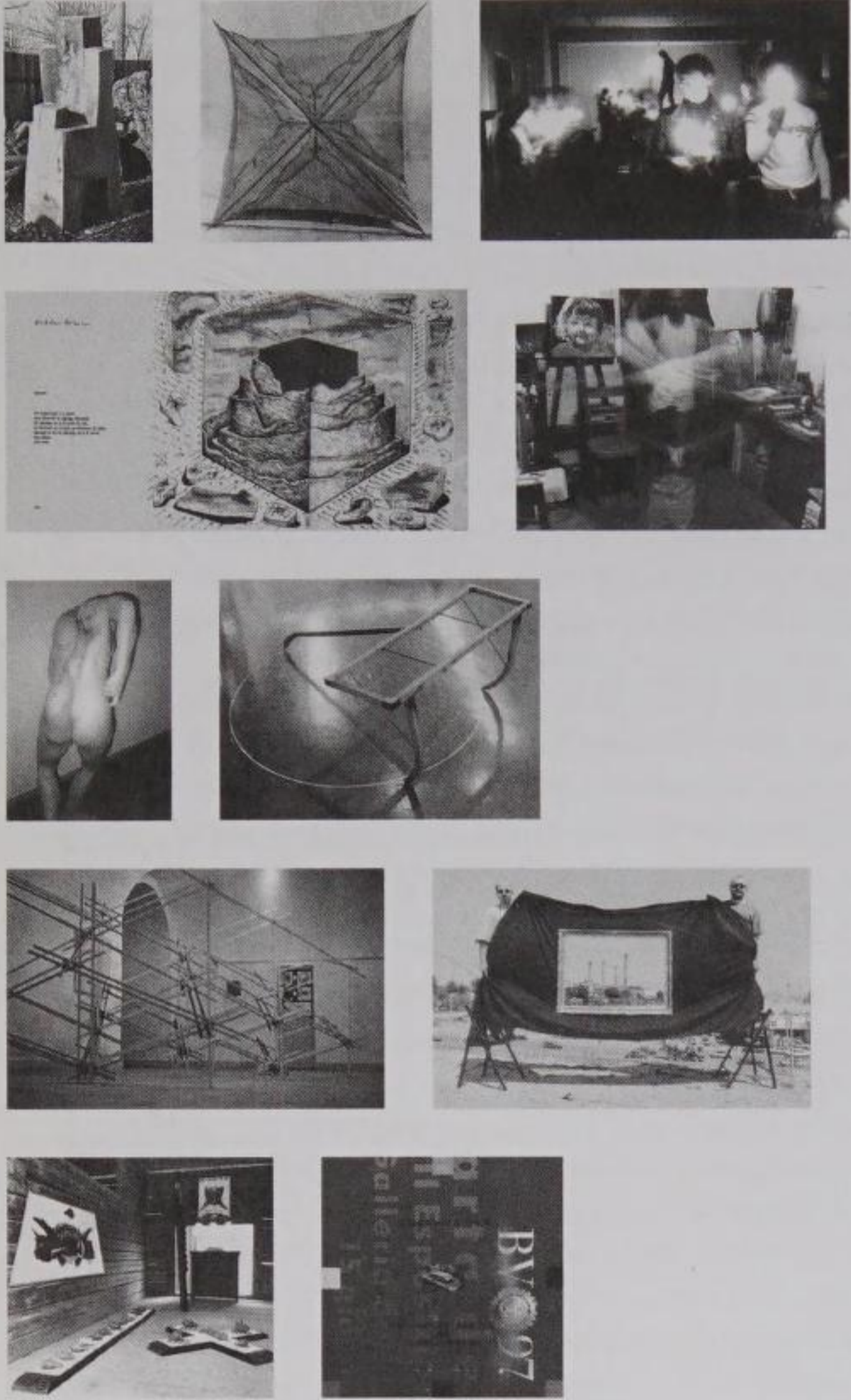
In a number of performances (documented first in photographs and later also in videos), Graur developed a Buster Keaton-like persona, athletically performing painful and absurd tasks with an impenetrable, motionless expression on his face. Indeed, all his work from this period may be described as impenetrable, for despite the obviousness of its themes and style and, above all, despite its meticulous realism, Graur's work remains distant, with an undercurrent of obscure symbolism that complicates the obvious surfaces in all their photographic detail.

Graur's art from the 1980s laid the groundwork for the developments of the next decade. The assimilation of pop-culture motifs without glamour, the contemplation of political discourse as mere spectacle, the focus on what is vulgar, aggressive and cheap — all these trends, so characteristic of the art of the 1990s, had already been tackled by Graur years before, at a time when escapism was the key word in cultural practice.

- Abstract value: this is a selection tool operating with the goal to achieve autonomy of judgement; criteria connected to the economics of art (circulation value, material value, media value; institutional acceptance) are ignored here in favor of low communication channels that give access to local attention, and through such to a position within the local (art) history. The abstract value of the artists of my selection is quantified (besides subjective factors of taste applied to their work) by:
 - The impact on the medium; each artist has a strong relationship with the medium (media) through which she or he is operating, and is accordingly changing the way in which those media are perceived by the public and used within the art community.
 - The impact on the group; through a conglomerate of qualities intrinsic to the work but also by their social practice, those artists influence(d) the medium term development of Romanian art.

There have been and there are quite a few artists in Romania that might be considered at least as interesting and challenging as those I chose, and in some cases even more so. It is also the case that some of the artists listed here were chosen for a specific, highly productive and intensely effective short period in their careers that was not necessarily sustained. Nevertheless, in my view this project is not about bringing a subjective type of justice to the less acknowledged; nor is it about shedding a stronger light on the admirably consistent artists versus the more rhapsodic ones; but about drawing a picture of the Romanian arts scenes from the perspective of dynamic influences and large(x) scale impact generated by artists that proved in any case to have a level of practice which is generally accepted as highly professional, and innovative.

- Exchange value: borrowed from the fuzzy domain of economics (which I use more as a Braudelian than as a Keynesian concept), it is a randomly fluctuating factor, that might, but also might not apply to a specific artist at a specific point in time. Since the entire weight of this IRWIN project lies precisely upon this factor, I had to take it into account. I did that reluctantly, and with the belief that art history (like the art markets and markets generally) has a chaotic behavior that cannot be influenced by mere opinion or analyzed from the perspective of experience and taste. But personal experience and taste are my only tools. Based on them, I mentioned in my selection the cases that are, or might be in the future, assimilated by the international art scenes. In some situations, a direct communication with the international context already exists, and helps my judgement. In others (most of them), I based my choice on the rule of precedents and similarities offered by art history, and of course on pure intuition.



From left to right and top to bottom:

George Apostu *Father and Son* 1968

Horia Bernea *Prapor* 1973

Ştefan Bertalan *The Myth of Life's Source* 1980

Sorin Dumitrescu *The Less Than Perfect Works*

illustration of poems by Nichita Stănescu 1980

Ion Grigorescu *Untitled* 1976

Wanda Mihuleac *Cain, le bien-aimé* 1990

Paul Neagu *Hyphen* 1975

Sigma *Barjoints* 1971

subREAL *Interviewing the Cities (Framing)* 2002

Marian Zidaru *Commemoration* 1988

Teodor Graur *Culture n°4* 2004

Russia

Ekaterina Degot

Mikhail Chernyshev

158 × 200 *Geometry* 1962

oil on canvas, 158 × 200 cm, private collection

fig. 21

In the early 1960s, the young Moscow artist Mikhail Chernyshev started to exhibit pieces of wallpaper and checkered plastic tablecloths in his studio, sometimes these were real and framed, and other times painted on canvas. While this may be seen as an example of international pop art, Chernyshev, in the Soviet context, was working with notions of 'the popular' and 'art' that were too specific for him to be understood simply as a follower of Western pop art. In the Soviet Union, mainstream or 'official' art was nothing other than a mass of media-distributed images. In contrast to the West, where original paintings and sculptures were customarily sold individually on the market (a practice that communist ideology viewed as bourgeois), in the Soviet Union, art was oriented almost entirely towards reproductions. Art images appeared in newspapers and numerous art magazines targeted at general readers, on posters, and even on objects used in everyday life.

The whole system of representation was based on the realistic image of the human face, just as the 'normative' (Western) version of modernism was based on the geometry of the square (and could degenerate into pure design as easily as socialist art could turn into pure propaganda). What Chernyshev did in this work was to interpret Soviet mass products — in this instance, a red and white checkered oilcloth — as 'media-distributed' geometry, 'propaganda', as it were, for Mondrian. In so doing, he criticised both the fetishism of the original (in abstract art) and the totality of the copy (in Soviet mainstream art). Chernyshev belonged to the unofficial art system, that is, art that was independent of both the private art market and state institutions. It was this unofficial

system (existing in unique historical conditions) that produced the most innovative work in the Soviet Union in the 1970s and 1980s.

Mikhail Chernyshev (b. 1945 Moscow) has been living and working in New York City since 1981.

Ilya Kabakov

Primakov-Sitting-in-the-Closet 1972

Album sheets: paper on cardboard, watercolour, ink, pen, Musée National d'Art Moderne Centre Pompidou, Paris

fig. 68

The monumental installations that Ukrainian-born artist Ilya Kabakov created in the 1990s tend to overshadow his earlier works, which he made while living in Moscow in the 1970s and which are in many ways particularly innovative. Of these, the *Ten Characters* series of albums (1972–5) is of crucial importance. Each of the ten albums contains loose-leaf sheets of paper with watercolour drawings that tell the story of an eccentric person with a bizarre hobby; the stories have ambiguous endings that can be understood as either the death or physical disappearance of the character. In *Primakov-Sitting-in-the-Closet*, a teenage boy inexplicably disappears from the closet where he always sits. The protagonist in *Arkhipov Looking through the Window* dissolves himself simply by looking outside. The 'plots' of the albums address issues of power and freedom, employing the spatial metaphors of the 'empty centre' and the 'margins': *Agonizing Surikov* views the world as if through a tiny hole, while *Decorator Malygin* can only draw on the edge of the paper.

Each album is saturated with text: first, there is an opening sequence that states what 'he [the character] says'; the main section then presents pictures of what

'he sees', most of which have laconic captions; finally, there are two postscripts — one narrative, the story as told by witnesses of the disappearance; the other theoretical, the story as interpreted by three imaginary 'philosophers' with three distinct viewpoints. These commentaries, from bombastic to naïve, contradict each other, creating an atmosphere where no final word is possible; the artist thus avoids any interpretation and literally prevents the viewer (the reader) from expressing any 'final opinion' (since such an opinion would inevitably fit into one of the three 'commentaries', which are all somewhat stupid). Instead, the viewer/reader is compelled to comment on the commentaries themselves. In this way, Kabakov produces a 'theatre of signs' that is accessible only to the few. The albums were originally presented by the artist himself, in a performance where he would take the drawings out of the box one by one and read the texts out loud.

Had such a presentation taken place in the post-war West, the artist might well have used slide projection or even animated film. But unofficial Soviet art, having access neither to the private art market (which was virtually nonexistent) nor to such mass-distribution media as newspapers, television, or even reproduction technologies (which were entirely state-controlled), was forced to confine itself to the sphere of 'private media', imaginary structures of communication without any complicated technology: cinema without film, typewritten magazines, and so on. The art forms that finally emerged were based on verbal communication, with real or fictitious dialogue, in an ideal, immaterial exchange. Communication thus became an institution, with practices that may be seen as precursors to the media art of the 1990s.

Ilya Kabakov (b.1933 Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine) now lives and works in New York City.

Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid

Post-Art # 1 (Warhol) 1973

oil on canvas, 105 × 105 cm, private collection

fig. 66

In Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid's *Post-Art* series (1973) — one of the first projects by the two conceptual artists who around 1972 founded the Sots-Art movement — the duo painted copies of twentieth-century masterpieces (such as Warhol's *Campbell's Soup* and works by Roy Lichtenstein and Robert Indiana) that looked as if they had undergone severe abuse in a museum: they looked smudged and dirty,

and were sometimes even partially burned. The burned edges and, indeed, the very representation of a (literally) 'dead original', recall Malevich's 1919 proposal to burn all pictures in museums and exhibit their ashes so as to create a 'compressed' archive. Malevich's idea posits a kind of 'copy' that does not through its creation destroy the original completely but rather preserves it in such a way that it becomes both inaccessible and eternal. What is more, the difference between the original and the copy became irrelevant both for Malevich himself (who eventually started appropriating his own early works) and the world of Soviet socialist art in general, where the private market, that is, a market in originals, was almost completely absent. In Soviet times, it was the 'ashes' of the original that were widely sold — cheap and bad reproductions with little connection, visual or otherwise, to the original artwork. Soviet artists, who rarely travelled, studied art history from faded postcards, and modernism was no exception; the only difference was that it was underground artists who were studying modernism — on their own, in public libraries — sometimes secretly 'appropriating' reproductions by tearing them out of library books (Komar and Melamid's pictures may also be seen as referring to this practice). In the *Post-Art* series, the 'dead' original is in the process of losing its 'body' only to become an even more original 'immortal soul' — the 'idea' of Warhol's *Campbell's Soup*. In this project, as in many others, Komar and Melamid anticipated not only 1980s art with its critique of originality but also the later questioning of modernist assumptions in general (including the opposition of copy to original) as too restrictive.

Vitaly Komar (b.1943 Moscow) and Alexander Melamid (b.1945 Moscow) now live and work in New York City.

Lev Rubinstein

Card Index 1974

object (cards in a box), photograph from

Transponanse 2 (Yejsk) 1983

fig. 78

Since 1974, Lev Rubinstein has been writing minimalist poetry on catalogue cards and reading it out loud, card by card, as a performance. *The Event* (1980, private collection) consists of twenty cards containing phrases that describe reactions to an approaching event — from 'Absolutely impossible',

through 'Just not now', to 'That is the end'. The event itself remains unnamed. Russian minimalism is based on a principle that may be compared to the theological notion of *apophasis*, the prohibition against expressing the sacred in positive assertions, which means one must confine oneself only to negative pronouncements.

The most innovative part of Rubinstein's project is its complete eradication of the boundary between art and writing. Since the private art market and the mass-media 'market of fame' were impossible options for both artists and writers, intermediate forms between art and poetry could be developed without any need to distinguish between the two: a text could be written as an object, a space, a fragment of time, or an event. Rubinstein's works from the 1970s looked forward to today's contemporary art, which, more and more, alternates between the traditional market and the market of events.

Lev Rubinstein (b. 1947 Moscow) lives in Moscow. He is a poet, essayist, and journalist.

Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid

We buy and sell souls 1978

offset poster, circa 70 × 50 cm

fig. 108

In this ambitious project, carried out during their first years in New York, Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid 'bought' numerous American souls and issued certificates of purchase for them. These souls included that of Andy Warhol, who was delighted to participate (his soul was later resold at an underground auction in Moscow, where it remains today). In this way, Komar and Melamid addressed both American consumerism and Russian spirituality, with, however, an ironic twist: here, the Russian artists were on the 'consumerist' ('devilish') side, tempting 'innocent' Americans, who were told that they possessed a 'mysterious American soul' and could sell it (just as for centuries Russian culture had successfully been promoting an analogous export commodity known as 'Russian spirituality'). Despite such a reductionist, 'all codes and no authenticity' approach to art, typical of the 1980s, Komar and Melamid were not attempting to identify with the power of the market. What they were actually doing was questioning and challenging the totality of the market by creating fictitious spaces of resistance to it. This approach may be seen as very much akin to present-day art, when similar spaces of resistance were

founded on notions of 'the Real', 'the body', 'sex', 'love', 'emotion', 'pain', 'chance', etc. Komar and Melamid, however, avoided the trap of essentialism always managing to achieve a delicate balance.

Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid

Telegram 1979

private collection

fig. 101

On 14 November 1979, the conceptual art duo of Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, who had recently emigrated from the USSR to Israel, sent a telegram to Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini that stated:

We Komar and Melamid take the responsibility for the earthquake in Iran on November 14, 1979 which is a response to the taking of American hostages in Teheran.

Compared to this uniquely epic pronouncement, Japanese artist On Kawara's famous *I am Still Alive* telegrams seem like lyric poetry. Komar and Melamid's megalomaniacal claim of authorship — a concept that has been constantly questioned by the two artists since the early 1970s — could only have been inspired by the authoritarian regime they once lived in, which appropriated the avant-garde figure of the absolute creator-destroyer. Here, Komar and Melamid opposed the modernist understanding of art as destruction with the understanding of art as documentation, which is characteristic of the late twentieth century: art as meta-action, not actual action.

It is especially noteworthy that, although Komar and Melamid's documentation declares 'responsibility', it is itself totally irresponsible. An art that might be considered 'responsible' would make the medium correspond to the message, the signifier to the signified. This is the position of modernism, which created transparent, readable signs. Art becomes 'irresponsible' where modernism is questioned and the medium and message are blatantly 'disconnected', where communication is experienced as miscommunication, and where the system of parameters is violated and the document is perceived as 'less' than what it documents and as 'inadequate' in comparison to the Real. Conceptual art has long been seen as being quite 'responsible', but Komar and Melamid's telegram reveals its other side.

Collective Actions

Trips Out of the City 1970s–80s

fig. 112

The performance group Collective Actions (Kollektivnye deystviya) was founded in 1979 by Andrey Monastyrsky, Nikolaj Panitkov, Nikita Alexeev and Georgi Kizevalter; these artists were later joined by Igor Makarevich, Elena Elagina, Sergey Romashko and Sabine Haensgen. The group produced not only performances ('actions'), but also abundant documentation, which included photographs, transcriptions of discussions, and theoretical essays. Much of this documentation was compiled in several volumes entitled *Trips Out of the City* (in typescript, beginning in 1980). The emphasis on documentation shows that, rather than following the logic of spectacle, Collective Actions followed the logic of commentary through the visualisation of discourse (most of the actions took place in a field of white snow that recalled a blank page). In the non-market society, independent ('unofficial') art creates institutions of non-market exchange: circles of artists united in continual dialogue.

In the group's actions, viewers (friends of the artists) were invited to take part in a 'situation' that was left unclear: they had to leave the city by train and then, on foot, follow some bizarre instructions, for instance, to pull a rope of unidentified length out of a forest (*Time of Action* 1978). Occasionally, something or someone (a person, a sound, an object) would enter the scene and distract their attention, though it often remained a mystery as to whether or not this disturbance was intentional. The viewer was supposed to experience a state of confusion and suspension defined as 'empty action'. The earliest performances were strictly minimalist and pristine: a person emerging out of the forest (*Appearance* 1976) or an alarm clock ringing suddenly from beneath the snow (*Liebllich* 1976). The second volume of *Trips* 1980–3 underscored the tension between what was live and what was recorded. In *Ten Appearances* 1981, viewers received instructions to walk from the centre of a field deep into a forest and then back out again; when they returned, they were immediately given false snapshots of their 'appearance'. The third volume (1983–5) included actions dealing with entropy. *Jupiter* 1985 bombarded the audience with a chaotic symphony of light flashes, slide projections, street noises, monotonous texts, and live music; the action was four hours and thirty-three minutes long — an obvious reference to John Cage's *4.33* (considerably shorter and

more charitable toward its audience). Minimalism gravitated towards shamanistic ritual here. In any case, the group's actions were ideally intended to be perceived as misunderstanding, non-awareness, misreading, discomfort and irritation. By visualising discourse, Collective Actions floats between the text and that which does not fit in the text (nature, boredom, existence, mistakes, chance, the magical, the sacred, etc.).

Collective Actions continues to develop projects and activities in Russia and abroad.

Boris Mikhailov

Unfinished Dissertation 1984

fig. 113

The 'dissertation' mentioned in the title of the work was a found object. Mikhailov, then an amateur photographer living in Kharkov, came across a typed copy of an unfinished research and used the paper by gluing a number of black-and-white snapshots, which he had taken at random, on the back of the pages (along with fragmentary captions). What resulted was indeed a dissertation, one that presented an extremely comprehensive theory of post-montage photography, making highly subjective references to Walter Benjamin, phenomenology, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and Andy Warhol's film *Sleep*. Here 'found photography' is privileged over intentional photography. Mikhailov's idea was 'to take photos in such a way that a photograph, barely born, would look like an old one, already seen.' He describes the reality as 'grey', placing it in opposition to the romantic (and modernist) dualisms of 'black/white', 'good/bad', 'high/low'. In his own practice, he questions the montage, as the clear ideological juxtaposition of images, which in his opinion offers viewers a catharsis — which is exactly what he seeks to avoid. In his theory, as well as in his photographs, Mikhailov advocates the unpremeditated and the purposeless, the amorphous and the erotic. Events should be excluded. Photography should not have 'quality', but should rather produce the impression of something 'barely admissible', something 'awkward' and 'shameful'. This approach is a radical response to the 'culture of spectacle': on one page, Mikhailov's photograph shows a landscape covered by photographer's hand, and the caption reads: 'If you don't like it, don't look at it. While some American just wrapped everything in cellophane.'

Boris Mikhailov (b. 1938 Kharkov) lives and works in Berlin and Kharkov.

Dmitri Prigov

Performances 1980s–90s

fig. 115

Poet and artist Dmitri Prigov is best known in Russia for the conceptual poetry he has been creating since the 1970s, some of which has taken the form of visual poetry (artists' books). In addition, Prigov would read his poetry out loud (or rather, scream it) as a performance, and it is such performance activity that may well constitute his most original contribution to Soviet, Russian and international art. Prigov continues to perform today, and on an even more monumental scale, creating, for instance, vigorous solo performances of original 'versions' of Wagnerian opera. In his poetry, Prigov continually cites forms of 'high' discourse (various, and very different, kinds of political and religious rhetoric) as well as 'low' discourse — everyday speech — resulting in an impressive chaos of banalities where language itself generates myth. As a performance artist Prigov rejects the notion of 'the death of the author', as with unforgettable passion he assumes the role of a rhapsodist of gods and heroes. Screaming, howling, whispering enigmatically, and tossing sheets of his poetry into the audience, he resurrects the figure of 'the artist as prophet', a medium of 'spiritual energies', and at the same time addresses the most basic traditions of art, both as an aspect of religion and as found in the most common pop-culture Hollywood stereotypes — spheres that have long been neglected by modernist and even postmodern highbrow culture.

Dmitri Prigov (b. 1940 Moscow) lives and works in Moscow and London.

Konstantin Zvezdochetov

Novel-Refrigerator 1982

103 × 30 × 51 cm, State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

fig. 114

In his *Novel-Refrigerator*, Konstantin Zvezdochetov — who was considered a 'bad boy' even for the 1980s 'new wave' underground art scene he belonged to — extends one of Russia's most cherished traditions, namely, the Great Russian Novel. What he creates is, indeed, not simply a visual narrative, but a real novel organised in the form of a refrigerator, totally blurring boundaries between different art forms. Text is written over the entire refrigerator (according to Zvezdochetov, the text inside the refrigerator refers to 'the inner life of the characters'), while the objects on the refrigerator shelves

(an imaginary and homemade port wine labeled 'Big Ben', for instance) are considered 'illustrations'. The novel is constructed as a do-it-yourself hypertext: the full-length text of dialogues barely alluded to on exterior surfaces can be found in a box inside the refrigerator. Not surprisingly, the refrigerator itself does not work, which, according to Zvezdochetov, ironically indicates the failure of 'cold' conceptual aesthetics in favour of 'warm' emotionality and even 'hot' eroticism.

Konstantin Zvezdochetov (b. 1958 Moscow) lives and works in Moscow.

Yevgeny Yufit

Killed by the Lightning 2002

fig. 237

An image of a group of men in black suits and ties marching through a landscape with few trees occurs in Yufit's film *Daddy, Father Frost is Dead* 1991 after a title card that reads: 'Soon, it became colder.' The scene cannot be deciphered easily, if at all, for Yufit's absurdist film adheres to the surrealist tradition of Luis Buñuel. This tradition, like that of early Soviet film (such as Vertov's), made little distinction between film and avant-garde art. Yufit takes a similar approach: he is not a 'professional' filmmaker but, rather, creates contemporary art in the form of 16 mm film (and most recently, 35 mm). His other activities include performance and spontaneous actions, and he also exhibits film stills as photographs, sometimes turning them upside down or emphasising their out-of-focus effect so that the image becomes an organic mass.

In the 1980s, Yufit was the leader of the Necrorealists, a group of artists and filmmakers that emerged in Leningrad in 1984; it included, among others, Yevgeny Kondratyev, Andrey Mertvy, Oleg Kotelnikov and Konstantin Mitenev. Leningrad, a city that has always been marked by a unique contrast between the stiff face of officialdom and a dark underground culture (and not only in Soviet times, but also in czarist St. Petersburg), was well suited as the birthplace for the group's macabre zombie shows. Yufit's films, the most compelling work to come out of the group, feature 'patriarchal' vampires living in the Russian countryside, people on the verge of insanity, and monsters. Yufit's concept of 'complete idiocy' which he developed at the time, may be considered post-postmodernist, since it aims to transcend the whole paradigm of art as language, entering the realm of the Real as something senseless, ecstatic, and corporeal.

Yevgeny Yufit (b. 1961 St. Petersburg) lives and works in St. Petersburg. In 1985, he set up the first independent film studio in Russia, Mzhalalafilm, which strove for radical experimentation. His filmography includes, among other works, *Werewolf Orderlies* 1984, *Woodcutter* 1985, *Spring* 1987, *Suicide Monsters* 1988, *Daddy, Father Frost is Dead* 1991, *Killed by the Lightning* 2002, and, most recently, *Bypedalism* 2005.

Ilya Kabakov (with Vladimir Tarasov)

Incident at the Museum, or Water Music 1993

installation

fig. 165

Ilya Kabakov's 'total installations', which completely and dramatically transform the exhibition space into some public or private 'institution' (an archive, a mental asylum, a hospital, or a living room) have become very well known over the past decade. This particular installation, however, has not yet been fully appreciated, although it is in many ways quite innovative. First at the Feldman Gallery in New York, and then at the Darmstadt Museum in Germany, Kabakov metamorphosed the neutral modernist exhibition space into an old-fashioned museum with respectable but somewhat shabby rooms with dark red walls, white moldings, and dark wood panelling. Disturbingly trivial genre paintings by an imaginary 'humble traditionalist' (they were made by Kabakov himself) are here displayed as 'masterpieces' in a halo of light. But the main point of Kabakov's work is the insertion of an event into this stage setting. It seems that a very infortunate incident has taken place here: on the day of the opening, the water pipes somehow burst and the rooms were soaked with water pouring in from the ceiling; employees had to set out whatever they could find to catch the water, and they also laid protective plastic sheets on the floor and over the velvet sofas. The minimalist 'water music' of drops falling into jars and canisters was written by the composer Vladimir Tarasov. Kabakov and Tarasov have thus created a theatrical *Gesamtkunstwerk*, with images, sounds, lights, and spatial effects, and so comment on the totalitarian Wagnerian tradition with its sense — and scale — of mega-catastrophe (something very familiar to artists raised in the Soviet Union), although at the same time the work includes a chance element typical of the highly individualistic Fluxus tradition.

Medical Hermeneutics

To Break the Mirror with an Icon 1993

installation

fig. 166

Pavel Pepperstein and Sergey Anufriev, who in 1989 founded Medical Hermeneutics with Yuri Leiderman (who later left the group), considered themselves disciples of Ilya Kabakov. But they were interested not so much in exploring the discourse of everyday life and common wisdom as in visualising highly ambitious layers of philosophical, religious, and political discourse, which they would pepper with quotations from such popular classics as *Alice in Wonderland* and *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, among others. The result was a highly original 'infantile conceptualism' capable of visualising the most sophisticated intellectual concepts of both Eastern and Western origin, including Zen philosophy and early Christian apocryphal texts, in a form that owed much to Hollywood film and Japanese animation. Pepperstein and Anufriev are children of a globalist universe who take advantage of the international character of their (Soviet) cultural background and are willing to question anything Western, Russian, Soviet, Jewish, Chinese, or sacred — indeed, anything at all.

One of their most profound works so far has been an installation realised in 1994 at the *Fluchtpunkt Moskau* show in Aachen, Germany, that visualized the traumatic contact of Western and Eastern paradigms. Here a mirror stands for (illusionist) Western art, while an icon represents a critique of such art; the icon is traditionally understood as an object both sacred and real that is fundamentally different from a naturalistic easel painting, which is considered 'false'. At the same time, the mirror represents the Western way of thinking (reflection), while the icon is inherently unreflective, based on faith. Not without sarcasm, Medical Hermeneutics show that the 'reality' of the icon (with its heavy metal frame) can easily destroy the fragile Western reflective spirit. According to the artists, however, in the case of an (economic) miracle, the icon might go through the mirror, just as Alice did in *Through the Looking Glass*, or the mirror, at the moment of impact, might transform into *Terminator 2*.

Pavel Pepperstein (b. 1964 Moscow) lives and works in Moscow and Israel; Sergey Anufriev (b. 1961 Odessa) lives and works in Moscow.

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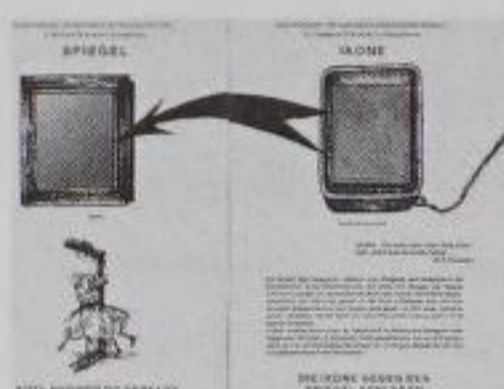
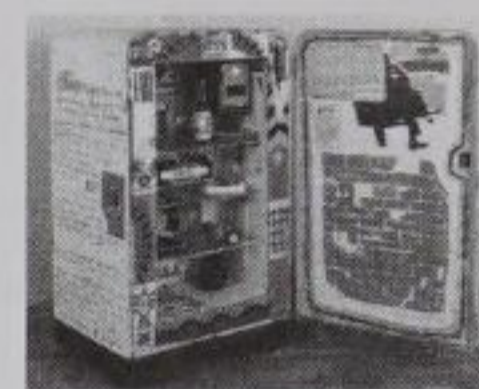
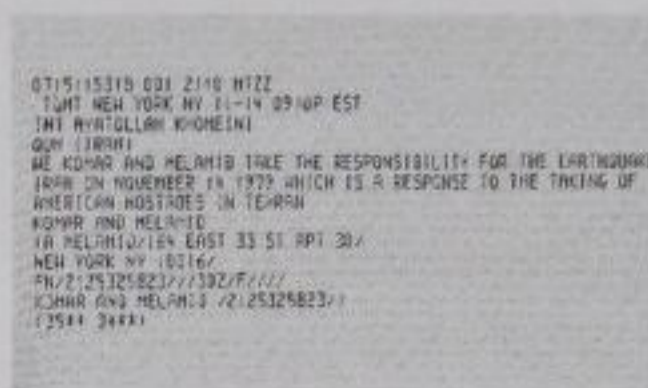
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Some Provincial Stories

Marina Koldobskaya

Alexander Arefiev (b. 1931—d. 1978) and his circle (Vladimir Shagin, Sholom Schwarz, Valentin Gromov, Richard Vasmi)

fig. 8

The artists of the Arefiev circle are considered to be the founders of the underground scene in Leningrad, though not for their artwork which was, for the most part, traditional realistic drawings and paintings with elements of fauvism and expressionism. These artists occupied a position at the very bottom of the social ladder, living lives characterised by poverty, homelessness, prison, psychiatric incarceration, and total rejection by the establishment. But as a result, they had an aura of sainthood and were seen as martyrs in the name of art.

The young generation that survived the siege of Leningrad during World War II had their own ideas about reality and realism. In the late 1940s, Aleksander Arefiev and his friends, all students at the Secondary School of Art, decided to devote themselves to the depiction of 'real life'. They discovered several places where thieves, cripples and homeless people would gather. One of these places was a cul-de-sac near Moscow Station, where the students witnessed some terrifying brawls. Arefiev later said they had seen a number of rapes take place while hiding in a dark corner of Smolensky Cemetery.

In the school year 1948–9, the students were expelled from the school on the grounds that they were engaging in 'formalism' and 'slandering reality' because they did not adhere to the socialist realist doctrine. Voyeurism, however, remained Arefiev's main artistic method. His *Bathhouse Series*, which appeared in 1951–2, was based on his experience of peeping into public bathhouses.

In the spring or summer of 1961, one of Arefiev's very close friends, a poet named Roald Mandelstam,

died from drugs and tuberculosis. Arefiev came up with a way to deal with his grief: he went to the cemetery and started living there as a crippled homeless man. Soon Vladimir Shagin joined him. They slept in a vault, collected bottles for money, and drank. Like his friend Roald Mandelstam, Arefiev started using drugs. At the same time he was writing an artist's diary. After several weeks of such a life, Shagin went berserk: he attacked a woman who was visiting the cemetery and took her handbag, convinced that it contained some report about them. As a result of this event, Shagin was sent to prison, and Arefiev terminated 'the action'.

Arefiev emigrated to the West in 1977, and soon after died in Paris, unable to adapt to Western life. Shagin's son, Dmitry (known by the diminutive name Mitka), became the leader of the Leningrad / St. Petersburg movement known as the 'Mitki', which may be the only art group in Russia that has managed to create a popular mythology about themselves.

Valery Cherkasov (b. 1946—d. 1984)

fig. 33

Leningrad musicians and artists from the 1980s call Valery Cherkasov 'a genius', describing him as 'the first person to invent such-and-such' or 'the one who did it in the 1960s' and so on.

In 1964, at the age of eighteen, Cherkasov assembled the phrase 'I want to eat' out of spoons and forks. Later, he created an opera based on the words of the Criminal Code of the USSR. These works may represent the earliest examples of Russian conceptual art. He founded the rock band Za, in which he played bass guitar. He made his living buying and selling vinyl records on the black market, and would paint abstract pictures on the vinyl. This led his friends to regard him as the first Russian pop artist.

Cherkasov sent coded letters with pictures to a friend of his who was an officer in the Soviet Army, an action that can be considered as the beginning of mail-art in Leningrad. His generation studied art from books that stressed the dangers of modernism. Cherkasov had a special talent for understanding and imitating things: he only had to see something once to be able to reconstruct it. He carried a soup-container in his pocket with hundreds of small pictures, from abstract expressionism to geometric minimalism, which constituted a self-compiled museum of contemporary art.

Cherkasov related to exhibitions, his career, and publicity with total indifference. Similarly, he had no regard for external signs of respectability. He was often filthy, aggressive, and openly and provocatively sexual. Such affected (but aesthetically aware) anti-professionalism is something he had in common with the Western punk movement.

He created the *Omnimuseum* in his tiny kitchen, where he assembled labels, stickers, bottles, mechanical parts, etc., and he was the first Russian artist to create an 'environment.' Towards the end of the 1970s, he made an unconcealed attempt to cross the Soviet border from the Vyborg District into Finland (as a result, he was incarcerated in a psychiatric hospital). In the same decade, and not long after the Viennese actionists, he performed a number of refined suicidal experiments. The most radical involved falling face down onto upright scalpels (he was alone at home when he did this) — he survived but nearly lost his sight.

Cherkasov died in 1984 in unknown circumstances. He was thirty-seven years old — in Russia, this is a portentous age at which to die.

Evgeny Rukhin (b. 1944 — d. 1976)

fig. 40

In St. Petersburg, legend calls Evgeny Rukhin the founder of Moscow Conceptualism. But in Moscow, he is regarded as a Leningrad expressionist.

In 1962, when he was eighteen, Rukhin created his first work of art *The Wall/KHUY* without even knowing how to paint. The painting depicted part of the wall in the vestibule of his building — it was dirty, ugly, and painted in 'very Soviet', drab colours, with vulgar graffiti scratched into the surface. Here was an object that could serve as the portrait of a civilization. The picture later fell into the hands of the Moscow collector, Leonid Talochkin, whose apartment was frequented by many artists. Rukhin's painting is

considered one of the important influences in the development of Sots-Art.

Rukhin began to study painting. His father was a famous geologist, and the young man seemed fated to follow in his father's career. Once, when Evgeny Rukhin was on a geological expedition, he had his paints sent to him and he painted the trees in the forest. This might be the first example of land art in Russia.

The Russian intelligentsia's disillusionment with official ideology led to a vacuum of ideas that was filled with 'spiritual seeking' and a 'return to the roots'. Russian Orthodoxy became the pop culture of intellectuals. After making paintings of birch trees, churches, and the Virgin Mary, Rukhin found his niche in collages and assemblages using icons supplemented with expressive painting effects. His unusual status as both a serious Russian Orthodox artist and an ironic pop artist brought Rukhin a certain amount of popularity and commercial success (by Soviet standards, of course). He became part of an underground circle (along with Oskar Rabin, Vladimir Nemukhin, Dmitry Plavinsky and others), exhibited in the West and corresponded — possibly through John Smith, the American Consul in Leningrad — with the artist James Rosenquist (his painting *Whipped butter for Eugen Ruchin* 1965, is dedicated to the Russian).

Rukhin died in 1976 in a fire at his studio. He was thirty-three years old.

Bob Koshelokhov (b. 1942) and the **Letopis (Chronicle) group** (1976–81)

fig. 58

Boris 'Bob' Koshelokhov was an amateur philosopher in the Leningrad hippie movement. He was one of the 'gurus' at the legendary bohemian club that would meet at the so-called 'Saigon' cafeteria. In 1975, he met the artist Valery Kleverov ('Klever') and took him on as his 'teacher'. Klever inspired Bob with the idea that he, too, was an artist. But, following a Zen principle, the teacher forbade the pupil to paint. Bob began to create 'concepts' — compositions made of objects from garbage.

Contrary to Sots-Art practice, the object was regarded as a sculptural entity that carried existential rather than social meaning. After Rukhin's death, Leningrad's unofficial artists decided to commemorate him with an exhibition. Despite the official prohibition of any such show, the artists decided to bring their work to the beach beneath the walls of the ss. Peter and Paul Fortress on 29 April 1976, and set up an

'open-air' exhibition. Koshelokhov brought one of his first 'concepts', *Exclamation*, which consisted of an old bedpan and a chamber pot, installed in the shape of an exclamation mark on an old black table. He managed to get past the militiamen with his work covered in plastic and to unwrap it. But then he was arrested and taken to the local militia office, where he had 'a one-work show'.

After several months, Kleverov emigrated and Bob took up the mantle of 'teacher'. He brought together a group of brash young artists with little education who called themselves Letopis (Chronicle). The group consisted of Elena Figurina, Mikhail Goroshko, Nina Alexeeva, Nelli Poletaeva and the very young Timur Novikov, who later became a leader of the group New Artists.

The fundamental principles of Chronicle, that 'everybody is an artist' and that you should 'paint your soul on everything using anything', led to neo-primitivism and radical expressionism. One of the artists, Aleksander Vasilyev, made pictures using his own excrement. The Chronicle members had little knowledge of such movements as the German *Neue Wilde*, the French *figuration libre*, graffiti art, or the Italian trans-avant-garde artists.

The New Artists (Timur Novikov, Ivan Sotnikov, Oleg Kotelnikov, Vlad Guzevitch, Georgy Gurianov, Viktor Tsoy and others) (1982–7)

fig. 120

According to information provided by the group known as the New Artists, *Zero Object* was 'created by the free creative act of Timur Novikov and Ivan Sotnikov on 12 October 1982'. This marked the beginning of the group's activity. The work was a ready-made — a booth with a rectangular hole in the side (possibly, it had been a cashier's window), which the artists had found in the hall of Leningrad's Kirov Cultural Centre while they were preparing an exhibition organised by Association of Experimental Visual Art (known by its Russian acronym, ТЕИ). This was a semi-official union of non-conformist artists founded in Leningrad in 1981. A municipal committee had given permission for the exhibition without realising that the booth was also one of the artworks. After it was labelled, it quickly became the highlight of the show. Viewers eagerly interacted with *Zero Object*, sticking their heads through the hole, taking photographs, and writing comments about it in the guest book. To further popularise *Zero Object*,

the artists attempted to produce 'a limited edition' of the object in the form of a set of empty cardboard slide frames.

The exhibition organisers, disgusted by the provocative nature of the action and afraid of making trouble with the authorities, ordered the removal of the object. This decision produced a rather bizarre uproar: other objects were withdrawn, people wrote letters of protest, negotiations were initiated, 'medical bulletins' were issued detailing the 'state of health' of *Zero Object*, and so on.

The episode with *Zero Object* revealed a contradiction in principles between the practice of contemporary art, on the one hand, and the social pathos and disciplinary experiment of non-conformism, on the other. Novikov and Sotnikov were looking back to the examples of Kasimir Malevich, who in the years around 1910 exhibited canvases with 'almost nothing' on them, and to Yves Klein, who showed an empty gallery in the 1950s. Novikov and Sotnikov's main innovation was in finding artistic potential in parodying Soviet (anti-Soviet) bureaucratic ritual. At the same time, documentation was becoming a valuable artefact in itself. Documentation was widely used by the New Artists, including Oleg Kotelnikov, Vlad Guzevitch, Georgy Gurianov, Viktor Tsoy and others.

Yevgeny Yufit and Necrorealism
(mid-1980s–early 1990s)

fig. 174, fig. 237

According to Yevgeny Yufit,

In March 1987, not far from the Pesochaynaya Station, we performed a statistical experiment. We were interested in the difference in the reaction of train drivers towards unusual situations. One evening, not far from the trains, several men acted out scenes of group anal sodomy and throat cutting in the snow. The reaction of the train drivers couldn't be guessed, since one could not see them from below. Only a freight train full of logs hooted its horn as it left in darkness. Later, this episode was included in the film *Spring*.

The Necrorealist group consisted of Yufit, who was the leader, Igor Bezrukov, Yevgeny Kondratyev, Andrey Mertvy, Konstantin Mitenev, Vladimir Kustov, Valery

Morozov, Aleksander Anikeenko and others. Group trips to the countryside were accompanied by extreme body experiments, such as winter bathing, jumping into ponds, running naked in the forest, etc. The artists improvised macabre rituals and filmed them. These trips can be described as representative of the archetypal quest of youth, an attempt to test the limits of the body by flirting with near-death experiences.

The Necrorealists' interest in everything dead and perverse, including sexual perversity, makes it possible to link them to the punk movement. However, their concerns seemed more related to a sense of the death of Soviet society. Their main source was psychiatric textbooks, research into the criminal subculture, black and sadistic humour, and archaic ritual. Another source was the mythology surrounding St. Petersburg as an 'imagined' city, built on marshland, which traditionally includes such motifs as mirage, mirrors, otherworldliness, and magical transformations.

In 1988, at the exhibition *From Unofficial Art to Perestroika (40 Years of St. Petersburg Art)*, the Necrorealists performed as an artistic group. Their films can be regarded as a 'resurrection of corpses,' and their painting and photographs (Morozov also worked with sculpture) — as stills, the 'second death' of cinema.

I Love You, Life!

(1990–2)

fig. 148

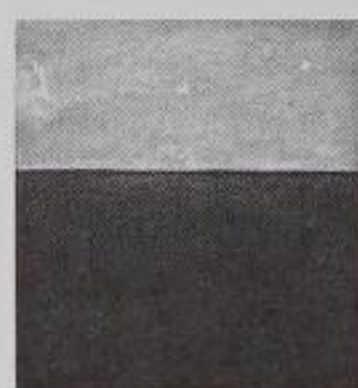
The first women's art group in Russia appeared at the end of 1990 in Leningrad. It was called I Love You, Life! and included Marina Alekseeva, Marina Koldobskaya, Marina Teplova and Eugenia Kamenskaya. Their strategy was based on the appropriation of Soviet clichés in the organisation of parties, installations, and environmental spaces. (The group's name is taken from a song from the Stalinist period.)

In April 1991, the artists took part in the multimedia show *Radix* produced by the French theatre La Fabrix at the Yubileyniy Athletic Centre. They created the installation *Nonna and Pasha (The Beauty and the Beast)*. This was one of the first contemporary art interventions into public space, and it shocked not only the general public but also the art world, first, by its carnivalesque character and, second, by its public representation of sexuality.

Visitors to the sports centre had to walk through an improvised temple entrance that parodied the architecture of totalitarian-era stadiums. Instead of

the usual athlete-heroes, it was crowned by a stuffed deer on a rock (this was a magnified copy of a common table-top souvenir of the time) and a naked female mannequin that recalled painted Soviet garden sculpture. Artificial flowerbeds surrounded the pedestals of both sculptures.

The administration of the sports centre, outraged by the naturalistic and erotic way the mannequin Nonna was presented with plastic nipples and pubic hair ordered the sculpture to be draped or dressed in panties. The artists refused to comply, and the installation (which had already been sold to a theatre) was vandalised at night by an unknown culprit, who absconded with the girl's face and buttocks.



From left to right and top to bottom:

Alexander Arefiev and his circle circa 1950

Valery Cherkasov *I Want to Eat* 1964

Evgeny Rukhin *The Wall* 1962

Bob Koshelokhov *Photo of Bob with his Concept* circa 1970

New Artists *o Object* 1982

Yevgeny Yufit and Necrorealism *The Wooden Room* 1995

I Love You, Life! *Nonna and Pasha* 1991

Moscow Recollections

Viktor Misiano

Yuri Zlotnikov on Vladimir Slepian

fig. 18

My generation was greatly influenced by abstract art. Consequently, we tried to study Western art history — in those years the first books on the topic appeared — and our own art history. However, there was a strong desire to do something ourselves. It was a time of meetings and self-expression.

Slepian went to the same art school as myself, but very soon he stopped drawing and started to study mathematics. He entered the mechanical-mathematics faculty of Moscow University. The language of mathematics enthralled him. We had a lot of metaphysical talks about the appearance of mathematics, about eternity within a row of figures. However, it was not professionalism but dilettantism that greatly stimulated our artistic intuition.

Later, Slepian decided to return to painting. In the beginning his art was very close to surrealism. He depicted devices that personified people, male and female sex. Then he started to insert mathematical formulas into his work. I can characterise his activities at that time as 'intellectual barbarism'.

Slepian's interest in abstraction was based on mathematics, on a flow of associations. He can be compared to Pollock, but Slepian was drawn to multiplicity, that consists of a lot of elements. This is an interesting combination that has both statistical and emotional elements in a rhythmic stream.

At the end of the 1950s he decided to leave the country. He said that the USA and Europe were free and beautiful civilisations and Russia was something like a concentration camp for him. In Paris he found himself involved in what he called 'transfinite' painting and in the actionist movement. There were some expressionistic acts: he put endless rolls of Chinese paper on the floor, where he acted in public, and painted on it.

Slepian was free from professional restrictions. Since he hadn't finished art school, and because he was an amateur mathematician, he symbolised a catalyst for freedom.

There was an inspiration and an ability for action in his work. He had a lot of youthful and fresh energy. He worked with a combination of different categories, i.e. he was free within associational contrapositions. Transfinite painting is a stream that creates unconventional conditions.

His art can be characterised as aristocratic. His colours, e.g. his rose and blue, are blazing and delicate but at the same time have depth and fullness. The strength of Slepian's art is in his gesture, full of polyphony, a gesture that shatters all settled schemes. His weakness is in the finality of expressionist language. Slepian's art, like his life, is a brave gesture, an intellectual game with a slight trace of adventurism.

There was something American in his dynamism and his fondness of multiplicity. Some dream of skyscrapers, of the violent and varied life of an enormous civilization. He left to discover and conquer the Western world and was one of the first to challenge society. However, he flew like a meteor, like a star, which before switching on, disappeared somewhere over the Western horizon.

He was fragrant and proud, an idealist 'spoilt' by freedom and dilettantism. Was it Russian infantilism? Perhaps. But he was an accumulator of energy that was very rarely seen in Russia. However, that's already history.

Yuri Zlotnikov, born in Moscow in 1930, was one of the first artists of the underground Russian tradition. He started his artistic career with abstract painting. In the late 1950s and early 1960s he produced his original abstract geometrical series Signal

Systems. He is the author of many theoretical and critical texts. He lives in Moscow.

Francisco Infante

Spirals and Spontaneous Games in Nature

fig. 31

The first strong impression I got at the beginning of the 1960s was of the endless construction of the world. I couldn't get rid of that experience, and as I was studying in art school at that time I started to solve this most important problem within the borders of my profession by using a pencil to draw squares, triangles, and circles, that totally filled sheets of paper. Later I became more proficient, or so I felt, with a form that expressed eternity. Eternity started to be expressed by spirals.

My first approach to the spiral was realised in a work later called *The Spiral of Eternity* 1963. Taking one turn of a spiral as a basic unit, I multiplied it, forming another turn of a bigger size. I continued that process endlessly.

By experimenting with eternal spirals I had come to the cognition of eternity itself. Consequently I tried to work out theoretical definitions of it. I called eternity positive and radical. Later I learned about Tadeusz Kantor's theory of multiplicity and was shocked by the similarity of our recognition of eternity. According to Kantor's terminology eternity was defined as potential and actual.

My second approach to the spiral was represented in a point as a sign of eternity. Because I felt the necessity of a context for the expression of the eternity of a point, I connected it in my images with a *Dynamic Spiral* 1963–4. As a result, the point had acquired its place, it started to be constructed by the space of a spiral, as the eternity of appearance-disappearance.

In the third cycle called *Spiral* 1965, the point, as an articulated sign of eternity, is not situated on the surface of the image but in the represented space of the spiral, the latter being also a sign of eternity. The point, which moved the border of the spiral, defines the eternal form of the spiral and on the other hand, in the place where two opposite vectors of an ideal spiral space can be recognised, coincides with its ideal being. Thus it paradoxically disappears (becoming a point by definition) and simultaneously unrolls the eternal 'body' of the spiral. In case the spiral visually coincides with the ideal vertical and horizontal, the

whole turn of the spiral transforms into a point that later unrolls into the spiral. It's interesting that the points of the spiral have this quality, i.e. any potential point of an eternal quantity realised as eternity when it appears in the crossover of the ideal horizontal and vertical. Moreover, the points of the turns' appearance and disappearance realises the length of the potentially eternal spiral.

In answering your question about other artists with similar strategies in art, I would like to say that my individual artistic attempts miraculously correlate with the activity of an American artist, Robert Smithson. I found out about his existence and art only at the end of 1970s, when my friends presented me with his catalogue.

To be precise, I started to work with spirals long before Smithson. I was the first to work with nature. But that's not the problem. The point is that we were working during the same years without knowing each other or about each other's work. We had nearly the same ideas on different sides of the Iron Curtain. Consequently we had our own spirals, characteristic and metaphoric images of nature. Being seduced by the temptation to define, I would call the situation: the West (Smithson) — the East (Infante).

Francisco Infante was born in 1943 in Saratov. From 1963 to 1968 he participated in an artists' group that from 1964 on was called Dvizhenie (Movement). From 1968 onwards, and together with his wife Nonna Gorunova, he made landscape installations. In 1970 he organised the Argo artists' group. From 1976 he worked on series of site-specific installations titled *Artefacts*. He lives and works in Moscow.

Dmitri Alexandrovich Prigov

Conceptual Seminar

fig. 102

I think that the best-known cultural event in Moscow in the 1970s — known among a wider public — was the so-called 'conceptual seminar'. This seminar was held in the apartment of a very nice doctor Chichko, who was a friend and supporter of artists. He was also quite artistic and had some artistic ambitions. The seminar was named after him and was held once or even twice a month from 1978 to 1985. Naturally, at the end it was not so intensive, as people grew tired, some left and other issues and strategies became topical.

However, at the height of the seminar more than a hundred artists, writers and ordinary listeners gathered in Chichko's flat. Among the consistent and active participants of the seminar were I. Kabakov, B. Groys, L. Rubinstein, V. Nekrasov, E. Bulatov, I. Chuikov and myself. The discussions were mostly led by the linguist M. Y. Sheinker.

Why was that seminar so important? First, at the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s all the Moscow conceptual circles, which before had been separate and represented mostly different underground groups, consolidated. The problem was that at that moment a lot of people had left and all these circles lost the necessary critical mass to survive separately. That was the reason for a natural desire to unite. But unification occurred not only on the basis of belonging to the underground, but mostly because of their ideological and stylistic similarity. Second, the seminar was very important in working out a common language and behavioural strategy, as very different people gathered in those groups. From the one side, there was Francisco Infante, ex-kinetist and close to the classical avant-garde tendencies; and from the other, Andrey Monastyrsky, who worked with actionism from the beginning. However, on the level of language and discussion, it turned out that the differences between these artistic practices could be easily overcome. Moreover, the seminar united nearly all the artistic representatives, from both literature and visual art, and later they formed an interdisciplinary circle of Moscow conceptualists. It also involved representatives of different generations: the seminar was where the first presentation of a new group called Muchomory (K. Zvezdochetov, S. Gundlakh, V. and S. Mironenko) appeared. It's interesting that the Moscow conceptual circle could unite people of such different ages, from 17 to 70. Later, when age differences had become more important and pressing, such a situation was no longer possible.

The main topics for discussion, analysis and investigation were the artistic and intellectual processes and activities from the 1920s to the present. Thus, the seminar performed a function of collective self-reflection and self-awareness, since in a situation in which there was a complete lack of art institutions and open public debates, that kind of work could hardly be done alone.

Finally, the seminar gave birth to and constituted a very important part of a phenomenon:

speech and articulated reflection as a main type of art activity. The practice of speaking became a basic element of aesthetic behaviour. Soon it outgrew the seminar and became part of various art practices. Consequently, the seminar is very important in the birth and construction of the Moscow conceptual school. I'm not minimising the importance of individual artists, but the additional energy of the seminar meant the birth of a speech discourse that was very valuable to us and which has no analogy in the Western art tradition.

Dmitri A. Prigov was born in 1940 and is one of the best-known Russian writers and artists. In the 1970s and 1980s he worked in visual poetry and produced a series of objects called *Stikhogrammy* and *Cans 1978-80*. He has published 15 poetry books and the novel *Live in Moscow* 2000. He lives in Moscow.

Natalia Abalakova and Anatoly Zhigalov (TOTART group) APT-ART (1982-94)

fig. 119

In 1982 the activities of Moscow's unofficial artists reached a climax. After militia men, out of uniform, closed down what was subsequently called the *Bulldozer* exhibition, artistic life in Moscow became very active in reaction to the repression. Officially sanctioned exhibitions took place in Izmailov Park, in the Apiculture pavilion in VDNKh. An exhibition hall in Malaya Gruzinskaya street also started to regularly exhibit alternative art. The group The Net was very active, Collective Actions continued to make conceptual actions, the group Muchomory appeared and, in collaboration with s/z group (Viktor Skersis, Vadim Zakharov), we started our APT-ART project. In the spring of 1981 we managed to stage the first performance festival in Pogorolovo, a village in the Kostroma region, to which we invited representatives of all these groups. During the same period we got the idea of doing regular apartment exhibitions.

The idea of an apartment exhibition was created by Sven Gundlakh (from the Muchomory) and was immediately supported by all young artists. Another Moscow artist, Nikita Alexeev, agreed to host the first exhibition in his apartment in Akademicheskaya Street. The first APT-ART exhibition was held from October to November 1982. During this period a Babylonian crowd thronged Alexeev's apartment. The multiplicity of the authors' languages, the differences

between the objects displayed were very vivid. Artists had managed to create an extraordinary environment with all the works 'existing' together, pushed and added to one another. Imagine a one-room apartment occupied by seventeen artists: five from Muchomor, three from Collective Actions, two from s/z and two from TOTART, alongside N. Alexeev and M. Roshal (ex-member of The Net). Try to imagine a room with a 'refrigerator' by K. Zvezdochetov, a slogan by Abalakova and Zhigalov, an enormous book-object and TV-sets by M. Roshal, multiple small objects by V. Zakharov, V. Skersis, A. Monastyrsky and by the youngest artist, Sergey Anufriev. The walls, ceiling and floor, the entire space, was filled with art in such a way that visitors had to make their way through the art debris, all the time trying to avoid the unusual objects that threatened them from all sides.

The term APT-ART was suggested by the gallerist Nikita Alexeev (perhaps with M. Roshal). To be more precise, they started to talk about ART-APT, but following our advice they changed the letter order: APT-ART seemed to be more justified, as it explained the meaning of that initiative, better art conforming to its own possibilities. APT-ART was recognised as its own valuable genre when the first apartment exhibition was organised. Before APT-ART, apartment exhibitions were an imitation of the traditional exhibitions in the usual spaces, spaces from which unofficial artists were banned. Here we meet not only an imitation but also an attempt to play with expositional conditions, i.e. the conditions of an apartment. The art in APT-ART was represented as a total space created by collective attempts not only at representation but also at collective experience.

For a new generation, the APT-ART exhibitions became the scene of a new movement in the Moscow conceptual art scene. The most important thing for us was this new generation didn't belong to Sots-Art.

Natalia Abalakova and Anatoly Zhigalov were both born in 1941 and each received a philological education. They started their artistic careers as painters and began to work together in the late 1970s conceiving a project titled Investigation of Art Practice in Connection with Life and Art, also called TOTART. They worked in a range of media, made actions, performances, installations, films and videos. In addition, they work as translators and theoreticians. Zhigalov is also a poet. They live in Moscow.

Leonid Sokov

Exhibition at Bolshoi Sukharevsky Pereulok 1976

fig. 89

The exhibition I would like to talk about took place in my studio from 10–22 May 1976. This was a period of numerous apartment exhibitions. After the *Bulldozer* exhibition and the outdoor exhibition in Izmailov Park in Moscow there were far too many. I participated in all of them. However, they mostly looked like social protests. Artists came and hung their works in such a way that the walls were totally covered by pictures. Nobody thought about a concept or organised display. Mostly those exhibitions had a social or political basis. Both the *Bulldozer* exhibition and the show in Izmailov Park were protest actions against the existing regime, and the official art system.

I decided to change this situation and move it from a purely political action towards an art event. Consequently, when in 1976 I invited artists to exhibit in my studio, it happened for aesthetic reasons. At that time I was very close to Ivan Chuikov and Igor Shelkovsky. Our work hadn't been widely represented in Moscow underground circles, each of us worked independently in some kind of self-isolation. We used to visit Kabakov and Bulatov, but we never showed our work in that circle.

In other apartment shows artists were usually represented by one work so, from the very beginning, I considered a wider representation of each invited artist using the entire space of the studio. Thus, this was the first curatorial project in the unofficial Moscow art world. However, I was acting intuitively and unconsciously.

Meanwhile, the situation changed my initial ideas. Igor Shelkovsky invited Rimma and Alexander Gerlovin and also Sergey Shablavin, and at the last moment Alexander Yulikov appeared and put his work in the corner. Thus, my curatorial ideas were immersed in the collective spirit of Moscow's unofficial art circle and in friendly relations. Nevertheless, the exhibition was characterised by an artistic and expositional unity, elegance and rigour. It became very popular and there were days when the studio was packed with people. Thus my initiative fulfilled its main criteria: it re-introduced an understanding of the value of the act of presentation. The spectators saw the exhibition and the works not as something different from 'official' art works, but as a complete work of art.

The exhibition had fulfilled its goals: from that moment the Moscow circle started to recognise

that we were setting a new trend, and to call us colloquially the Conceptual group (although we weren't conceptualists). It became obvious that a new generation had arrived whose approach differed from the Sretensky Boulevard conceptualists, who had been rather interested in language analysis. At a time when Kabakov and Bulatov were working with text, we returned to the image and its role in modern mythology.

The exhibition only lasted for ten days because the amount of people it attracted caused serious problems within official circles. Ivan Chuikov still recalls this exhibition as a very important and significant one for him. The participating artists became better known and soon entered underground circles.

The show also played a very important part in the creation of *A/Ya* magazine. When Igor Shelgovsky left for Paris in 1979 and published the first issue, it consisted mostly of the artists of the Conceptual group who had taken part in that exhibition.

Leonid Sokov was born in 1941 in the village of Mikhalevo in the Kalinin region. In 1979 he emigrated to the USA and has participated in numerous New York exhibitions (Storefront Gallery, a&p Gallery, Zeus-Trabia Gallery and others) and has also taken part in many projects around the USA and Europe. His work was presented in the Russian pavilion at the 49th Venice Biennale in 2001. He lives in New York.

Igor Makarevich

A/Ya Magazine

fig. 107

Instead of a work of art, artist or tendency, I would rather like to talk about the periodical, *A/Ya*, as I find both its appearance and context absolutely unique and without comparison.

The first issue of the magazine was published in 1979. The end of the 1970s was a special time in the life of Moscow's unofficial art scene: it reached maturity, and embraced a multiplicity of tendencies. The magazine appeared at that time, showing an ability for serious self-reflection. In other words, before then there were artists and works of art, but there was no practice of analysis and description. Artists had no opportunity to experience critical reflection of their work by a third party, though the necessity for this was very clear.

The 1970s were also characterised by a loss of cohesion within the unofficial Moscow art scene, as most of the artists emigrated. Well-established contacts broke and the situation changed significantly. The artists that were still in Moscow continued to work and develop within the local situation, and those who had left felt a necessity to remain in contact with that context, even though this was very difficult. At the same time these immigrants started to understand the structure of the Western world, an experience that was very important for Moscow. It was vital to set up a regular information channel, a platform to exchange experiences. Thus the Moscow artist Igor Shelkovsky, who had emigrated to Paris several years earlier, received a small amount of money from an art collector and sponsor of the arts to make the first step. At the time that individual had no desire to reveal his name, though today we know it was Jack Milkonian. Consequently, Shelkovsky started the heroic activity of creating the magazine (it was heroic because he couldn't possibly imagine all the difficulties he would encounter during the following years). Although the idea was to produce two issues a year, only seven were published during its seven years of existence (1979–86).

During that time Igor Shelkovsky was the editor-in-chief of the magazine. The head of the Moscow editorial board was Alik Sidorov (but in the magazine, for his own safety, he was mentioned under the pseudonym Alexei Alexeev); and the New York editorial board was led by Alexander Kosolapov, assisted by Rimma and Alexander Gerlovin. The entire Moscow and international Russian art community took an active part in this initiative. Thus the main peculiarity of this project lay in the fact that it was a unique publication supervised by artists but mostly written by critics, intellectuals and theoreticians, from Boris Groys, Margarita and Viktor Tupitsyn to Vitaly Patsukov and Yevgeny Barabanov. It was a very professional magazine, different from traditional amateur art magazines, but made possible only thanks to the efforts of the artists themselves.

One could hardly overestimate the importance of *A/Ya*. The magazine published and presented the work of the best-known figures of the Russian independent art scene (the only artist not presented in the magazine was Igor Shelkovsky himself). It was the first time we could read analytical texts about our work. Before that there were only ethnographic texts by Western journalists or slander in the Soviet official

press. Before *A/Ya* Russian intellectual art was based on kitchen conversation and discussion clubs in studios and in private spaces. In the magazine we met an objective phenomenon: the art process was channelled into a textual space that marked the difference between internal and objective perception. It was like magic, a miracle to see your own work printed on glossy paper. Because only Western artworks could be seen in reproduction, seeing our own work in *A/Ya* made us associate ourselves with the West. It was a new step in our self-esteem and recognition; the birth of *A/Ya* transformed its participants and brought a new status to them and their creative work.

A/Ya wasn't only a periodical covering contemporary art events; it became the basis for an art life infrastructure.

Igor Makarevich was born in 1943 in Tripoli, Georgia. From 1976 he was a member of the Collective Actions group. In 1979 he had an exhibition at the Centre George Pompidou in Paris. He has also exhibited in the Bochum Museum and the Ludwig Museum in Germany, as well as in the USA, including the Phyllis Kind Gallery, New York and the Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Connecticut. He lives in Moscow.

Vitaly Patsukov

The Apology of a Space

fig. 87

'The Milky Way is also a Bird's Way,' Mircea Eliade

A peculiarity of East European art is its inseparability from the life of its co-ordinates in space. The art consciousness of Eastern Europe exists in a situation differing from other cultural geographies, a phenomenon, which could be referred to as 'tight space'. This quality of space, delineated in literature (Dostoevsky, Kafka, Platonov, Kharms), isn't manifest in the field of visual arts. Consequently it can't remain within the frame of the usual calendar of art history. It is unnoticed as a unique event, thus it leads to an unnoticed space, and to a model in which a unique art behaviour exists, and, naturally, to an imaginary form for human life itself.

The most energetic art witness of this phenomenon, one that unfortunately wasn't noticed by the critics, might well be the Moscow group *The Nest*. The group appeared in the mid-1970s, at the

opening phase of Russian conceptualism, coinciding with passionate self-reflection inside the alternative art circles. *The Nest* (Mikhail Roshal, Viktor Skersis and Gennadii Donskoi) appeared at the historical exhibition of Russian unofficial art at the VDNKh on 21 September 1975. The three artists took their places within a natural nest, two metres in diameter and made from green willow branches. They lived there for the whole exhibition, being constantly provoked by the authorities in their desire to destroy the environment of the performance. Spectators eagerly took their own places in the same nest, children played there. *The Nest* was physically inhabited and it was also filled with social and cultural meaning. It was transformed into a sacred place, and as a gesture of reverence to it the flag of a hippy art-group Hairs was installed above *The Nest* on the second floor of the exhibition. The flag was a special symbol, in which a lot of social taboos were annihilated. The co-ordinates of *The Nest* marked the space of The House of Culture VDNKh, and were a manifestation of other dimensions and other rituals. As must happen in these matrixes of space, without waiting for the end of the exhibition firemen threw *The Nest* into the garbage, justifying the gesture by citing fire safety rules.

With this concrete action and in its subsequent behaviour *The Nest* released fundamental traditions. The group modelled the beginning of creation and realised a marking out of space as its understanding, symbolising birth and 'sitting on the egg of the future'. Participants declared that life functions selectively and discreetly and that life is 'marking out' space in accordance with its own dimensions, marking it and at the same time keeping it. The consistency of *The Nest*'s orientations is revealed in its subsequent actions, *Fertilization of the Soil*, *Minute of Silence* and *Let's Become 1 Meter Close* (all in 1976). Intuitively but very organically, they realised themselves within the strategies of the canonical cultures of the past, which were passed neither by John Cage, nor by Joseph Beuys.

The image of *The Nest* as a matrix appeared later in Ilya Kabakov's 'communal' installations. While these weren't directly connected to the events of 1975, they also regarded Russian life as a 'tight space'. These installations, which relate to the topos of the nest Kabakov used to refer to, were made of garbage, in which he has tried to live as though in his own 'capsule'.

Vitaly Patsukov was born in Moscow in 1939. A historian and theoretician of contemporary art and culture, Patsukov is the curator of numerous exhibitions and the author of the books *Russian Naive 1994* and *The Problems of Art Synthesis 1995*. He lives in Moscow.

Vladimir Salnikov

Family at the Sea by Dmitry Zhilinsky

fig. 36

In the summer of 1965 I was greatly touched by Dmitry Zhilinsky's painting *Family at the Sea* 1964. It was an absolutely flat and even painting (tempera on wooden board) with big, bright surfaces of pigment and static figures as in the frescos and paintings of the Early Renaissance. It was so different from official and unofficial Soviet painting, which, first of all, was always oil on canvas in frames and, secondly, was dynamic — as in the depictions of roads and trains in Georgy Nissky's pictures.

The 1960s in both official and alternative Soviet art were the years of modernism, or at least a modernistic pathos which impregnated all of Soviet society. This proto-Renaissance painting by Zhilinsky seemed to be nonsense, a black sheep, as well as a discovery. He rejected modernism, dynamism directed at the future, and cancelled the hopes for a bright future to be won by the scientific-technical revolution that was the main goal of Soviet society. He outlined another future, an eternal present, a 'meta-historicism' in which all the historic phenomena of the past, present and future could be represented simultaneously, like the figures in this beautiful picture.

Family at the Sea outlined the future of the Soviet art of the 1970s, both the official art and Moscow Conceptualism, a conservative child of Moscow surrealism. The Soviet art of the 1970s has its origins in this painting, as this was a time of disappointment in modernism. At that time the West was moving in the same direction.

In the early 1980s I was listening to a report on the architecture of postmodernism at the seminar on history and the theory of design by Khan-Magomedova in the Institute of the Theory of Design (VNIITE). This was the first news of a Western phenomenon: the situation in Western architecture and seemed similar to that in Soviet architecture, consequently in the whole culture. This meant that the West was also disappointed by modernism. But it was

late with its frustration and I remembered *Family at the Sea*, which was the first work to draw a postmodern perspective both for the West and for the East.

Vladimir Salnikov was born in Chita in 1948. An artist and critic of contemporary art, he regularly writes for *The Moscow Art Magazine* and lives in Moscow.

Alexander Yulikov

On the Significance of Children's Book Illustrations in the 1960s and 1970s

fig. 84

As everybody knows, in the Soviet Union of the 1960s art culture was divided between the official and the alternative, with the latter excluded from legal representation and distribution. Being excluded from public life and included in the underground meant we tried to find 'legal' work. Like many others, I illustrated books. This applied artwork gave artists both professional status as artists and the money on which to live. Ilya Kabakov, Eric Bulatov, Vladimir Yamkilevsky and Eduard Shteinberg all worked in one way or another with book illustrations, mostly for children. But the most important thing was that some artists based their authentic ('true') art on that 'applied' work.

First, there are the conceptual albums by Kabakov and Pivovarov, which were very original in form. Perhaps we can find something similar in Western art, but in reality, if one looks at them closely, these works are somehow connected, stylistically and in their concept and narrative, with the children's books by these artists.

An artist draws children's illustrations, and later creates a work that uses images done in the same style as his illustrations and, what is more important, supplied by signs (I would call them children's calligraphy copy-books) and a text (also 'childish'). There is a historical-cultural pre-history to the dialogue of Moscow artists with the children's world, starting in the 1920s and 1930s, with Daniil Kharms, Kanashevich and others. One can add that many poets and writers of my generation, such as Genrikh Sapgir and Igor Kholin, used to work as writers of verse for children. For avant-garde poets, children's literature was a way out, the only possibility of presenting their work officially to a wide audience.

Meanwhile, artists such as Kabakov and Bulatov managed to make their own 'grown-up' art on the

basis of their work for children. I think that this could only happen in Russia and never in the West. These days the followers of this direction, notably Pavel Pepperstein, work with a mixture of story and illustration and cultivate a childish inaccuracy in their drawings and an infantilism in their images. (Pepperstein is a direct heir of this tradition as he is the son of Viktor Pivovarov.)

Alexander Yulikov was born in 1943 in the village of Vitskie Poliani in the Kirov region. He was a part of the exhibition in Izmailovo Park (1974), in the Apiculture pavilion in VDNKh (1975), in exhibitions at O. Rabin's and L. Sokov's apartments and in exhibitions abroad. He had a solo show in Warsaw, *Furmanny Zauek* 1989 and took part in *URSS aujourd'hui. Art Sovietique de la collection Ludwig* at Musée d'Art Moderne in Saint-Etienne, France. He lives in Moscow.

Konstantin Zvezdochetov

Metro

fig. 106

Starting from the mid-1970s, three main lines appeared in non-official art circles. Komar and Melamid, Kabakov and the Collective Actions group represented these. Each line had its own followers and pupils. As a whole, the circle was very active, and its internal discussion was intensive. The links these artists had with the international art scene were minimal, as they were restricted by geographic, political and other circumstances. Internal resources mostly inspired their development.

During that peripheral and self-sufficient period of development a lot of art experiments took place that were underestimated, not understood and rarely preserved. There are many examples of the making of works similar to those found internationally. For example, at the end of the 1970s and in the context of a Moscow conceptual school, which ignored any references to the history of art, Sergei Mironenko and I turned to the subject of ancient history and the medium of painting. In 1978 we made paintings (*Anthony and Cleopatra, Romans in the Period of Decline*) taking our themes from ancient history. We had also been attracted to the styles of various periods, which was the basis for *The Portrait of Portos* painted in a baroque style. This happened simultaneously with the Italian trans-avant-garde, which we only became

aware of at the end of the 1980s. On the one hand we were ironic, but on the other we were sincerely nostalgic for beauty.

Together with forward-looking global artistic tendencies, there were some discoveries that were repeated by artists from other regions and countries many years later. One example was the action *Metro*, performed by us as the Muchomory group in 1978.

During those years Kabakov and his artistic circle introduced the theory of the 'white hostile space', which was unsuitable for human existence. Our idea was the following: we believed that white space was not hostile and empty, but inhabited and alive. Consequently, we started to work with something that for our predecessors (the older conceptualist generation) signified hostility.

Because of its aesthetics, the Stalinist underground system was regarded as something alien at that time: a corridor, a spider-like labyrinth and an uninhabitable space. It was very important for us to give a human dimension to that place, to psychologically assimilate the space of the Soviet metro as a space for life. At the same time we tried to recognise it as a mythological space (as a part of the Soviet myth according to which it was 'the most beautiful and glamorous metro in the world').

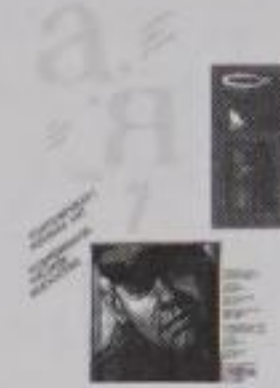
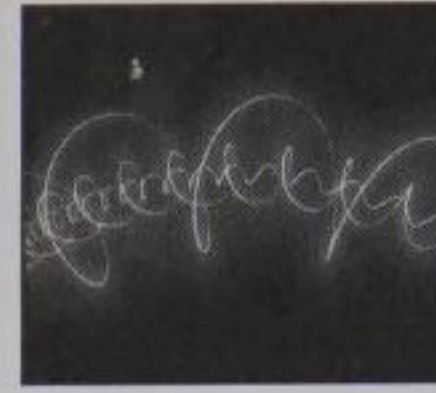
The experiment was as follows: we decided to enter the 'underground world' and live there as long as possible. Early in the morning, at six o'clock — when the metro opened — we entered and used it to travel, leaving train cars at each station. Meanwhile we kept a diary, recording every stop and putting down everything that happened to us. Moreover, we invited our friends and relatives to the metro as if it was our home. They came to meet us at different stations, in which we, like generous hosts, invited them to have a coffee and a sandwich. When the metro closed and everyone was asked to leave, we gathered our things and left, experiencing this return from the 'underground world' as a second birth.

It's interesting that after many years I discovered that similar actions consisting of experimental 'living' in the underground world of a metro were undertaken by other artists. The main peculiarity of our art world of the 1960s–80s lay not in its concrete discoveries and the dates actions were performed. The difference from the West lay in an atmosphere of unselfishness. It was the atmosphere of a big laboratory, one in which vast numbers of people were in almost 'intimate relations'. Every day each one of us brought his masterpiece and

everybody accepted it and was excited by it. This was an atmosphere of total friendship and love, something that never happened in the pragmatic Western world.

Konstantin Zvezdochetov, one of the leading Moscow artists, was born in 1958 in Inta. In 1978 he became a member of the Muchomory group, and in 1986 of the World Champions group. He has participated in numerous exhibitions, including the Aperto at the 44th Venice Biennale in 1990 and Documenta 9 in 1992. Zvezdochetov is the author of numerous manifestos and critical texts. He lives in Moscow.

Interviews conducted by Viktor Misiano, Moscow, December 2002-March 2003, in collaboration with Daria Beskina; texts translated from Russian by Ksenia Kystiakovskaya



From left to right and top to bottom:

- Vladimir Slepian *Composition* 1957
- Francisco Infante from the series *Eternal Spirals* 1963
- Conceptual Seminar 1978–85
- APT-ART Series of events in private apartments 1981
- Exhibition at Bolshoi Sukharevsky Pereulok Leonid Sokov's installation 1976
- A/Ya Magazine Cover of issue n° 7 1979
- The Nest *The Nest* 1975
- Dmitry Zhilinsky *Family at the Sea* 1964
- Ilya Kabakov Children's book illustration 1976
- Muchomory *Metro* 1978

A Brief Narrative of Art Events in Serbia after 1948 Branislav Dimitrijević

This text is constructed as an illustrated survey of the most significant art events in Serbia since 1945 — some of these events helped shape the artistic ideologies of their time, while others influenced later art processes. As with any survey of this kind, there are drastic exclusions. The criteria used in selecting artists and events were designed to capture aspects of Serbian art that make it both locally distinctive and relevant for the wider international context. With all but two exceptions I have limited this text to events that took place in Serbia for the sole reason that other contributors to the *East Art Map* will deal with art practices in the other regions of the former Yugoslavia, which once constituted a unified political and artistic territory. Were it not for this, I would be seriously negligent to the sense of artistic community that accommodated an abundant interaction of ideas, especially between the late 1960s and mid 1980s.

Models of the Socialist Artistic Mainstream:

Boža Ilić, Mića Popović, Petar Lubarda

One of the general conclusions often made about post-World War II Yugoslav art is that, unlike other countries that became single-party states soon after 1945, Yugoslavia was not affected by the dogma of socialist realism. For only a brief period, which ended with Tito's break with Stalin in 1948, was socialist realism considered to be the official style, devoutly followed both by artists who had been involved with the social art of the left in the 1930s and by those whose predilection for Parisian modernism was seen as bourgeois. After 1948, as the argument goes, it took only a couple of years for Yugoslav art to make a complete break with socialist realism and adopt modernism as its *lingua franca*. No longer was the work of art obliged to represent socialist reality; rather, its

purpose was to enhance artistic 'freedom and self-awareness', which were seen as necessary for the creation of the new *Weltanschauung* of the 'post-revolutionary generation'. This trend for politically 'safe' modernism (abstract painting and sculpture with reduced representational references) was labelled by the literary critic Sveta Lukić as 'socialist aestheticism'. Later critics used the more general term 'socialist modernism.' It is striking that socialist realism in Serbia did not engender any artists who were not already known.

The only *Homo Novus* was **Boža Ilić** (fig. 5), who, after rising to socialist stardom in the course of a few months, was instantly forgotten once this style was no longer considered orthodox by the cultural policy-makers of the new state. In Serbia, socialist realism was never cultivated as an international trend, one that ranged from the Soviet Union's state-controlled Zhdanovism to the various artistic currents associated with political struggle in capitalist countries (e.g. the Popular Front in France). Rather, it was a local affair based on political opportunism and it failed to produce any works that formally met the standards of the Soviet model. Boža Ilić, for instance, created his most famous work, the monumental painting *Sondiranje terena na Novom Beogradu* (*Driving a Borehole in the Terrain of New Belgrade*) 1948, in strict adherence to pre-war academic principles, composing the painterly space and arranging the figures in the manner of the pre-war Yugoslav bourgeois painting of such 'intimists' as Milo Milunović. To be sure, the subject matter was quite different from that of the still lifes and other politically removed genres of the intimists: Ilić portrayed a quintessential motif for the new state, the beginning of the construction of the city of New Belgrade, the biggest monument in the ideology of

socialist modernism. In the words of Ljiljana Blagojević, a leading theoretician of architecture, this ideology was based on the confusing 'negative reference framework of rejecting both functionalism and constructivism and the Soviet practice of "formalist eclecticism",' which marked the Yugoslav socialist project in architecture as 'underdeveloped and unfinished modernism.' The case of Boža Ilić is symptomatic of the theoretically conflicted future of Serbian art: a socialist realist reliance on pre-war bourgeois academism while depicting the initiation of a modernist utopia within the context of a new socialist state. Socialist realism cannot therefore be seen as a break with the past, but rather as a period of continuity from the underdeveloped modernism of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia to the programmatic modernism of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. In retrospect some writers have attempted to view Ilić not as a socialist realist but as a socialist-romantic, considering the painter's great naïveté with regard to the political framework. Other artists were less naïve; they actually were *realists* — political realists.

The best-known Serbian dissident artist, **Mića Popović** (fig. 4), who not so long ago was the first to rehabilitate Ilić, is generally viewed as personifying the break with socialist realism in his first solo show in 1950. This exhibition has become one of the greatest myths in mainstream art historiography in Serbia. Actually, this is simply a way to establish the dissident artist as a person who takes a critical stance towards political structures while fully enjoying the institutional benefits available to many artists in the climate of 'moderate totalitarianism' that characterised Tito's regime. For example, it was Mića Popović who as early as 1950 received the first state grant for a study trip abroad (three months in Paris). His show was more famous for its catalogue text (which was written by Popović himself — a very unusual practice at the time) than for the paintings, which fell short of the modernist promises stated in the text. The paintings, which were not reproduced in the catalogue, fully adhered to realist principles and showed little evidence of any demand for the primacy of form over content, as was stated in the catalogue text. One of the paintings on view, *Autoportret sa maskom (Self-Portrait with Mask)* 1947, may be seen as emblematic for its 'content'. The face of the artist is disguised by a smiling mask, thus symbolising the position of the dissident whose real political identity cannot be discerned and who, in public, displays the false

optimism required by a period in which bourgeois individualism was seen as counter-revolutionary. Paradoxically, despite producing more dissident myths in his subsequent career, Mića Popović actually kept the spirit of realism alive and failed to stimulate any innovative artistic practice. There has been some dispute over what should be considered the first modernist art event in socialist Serbia. While some see Popović's show as the turning point, others are inclined to locate the break almost a year later, in 1951, when the Montenegrin painter **Petar Lubarda** (fig. 10) had his Belgrade show.

Lubarda exhibited monumental paintings connected with folk traditions and inspired by the unique visual impact of Montenegro's rough mountain landscape. These striking images show an idiosyncratic and autonomous path towards an abstract pictorial language that has certain remote echoes of Parisian modernism. The painting *Guslar (The Gusle Player)* 1951 employs the iconic motif of the folk singer who plays the gusle, a one-string instrument that is particularly atavistic for remote mountain areas. Singing and gusle-playing signify the oral transmission of heroic tales from the past (and the present), accompanied by the emblematic ascetic identity attributed to Montenegrins. While Lubarda was painting this and other more abstract work, art criticism was completely dominated by formalist discourse. Throughout the late 1960s, the question of how something was painted, rather than what was painted, became the sole subject for discussion. The cultural implications of combining a modernist visual vocabulary with traditional motifs suggested an ideal synthesis. Consequently, paintings like *The Gusle Player* were celebrated in the emerging, internationally aware formalist criticism as a break with the academic norms that had previously commanded strict obedience. The painter and lawyer Miodrag B. Protić, an extremely influential art writer who in 1965 founded the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade, views Lubarda's exhibition as the turning point, illustrating this claim with compelling formalist commentary. For instance, Protić asserts that Lubarda was the first to break with the rules of the Belgrade academy, which did not permit a colour to appear in the same tone or hue more than once on a canvas and taught that any painting without the illusion of three-dimensionality was merely decorative. Lubarda's paintings from the early 1950s reduced the 'values' of coloured surfaces and presented them as flat. Lubarda

was the first post-war Yugoslav painter to receive international acclaim, and Herbert Read, one of the most influential art critics of the time, considered him 'a painter with a great sense of rhythmical composition'. Politically, Lubarda occupied a position quite different from that of Popović. He stated that he had not been forced to paint in the socialist realist style in the 1940s (as most other modernist painters and future dissidents claimed). Also, he was part of the Independent Artists Group, who came together to oppose the Artists Union and who could be considered the first leftist dissidents. In the early 1950s, these artists left the official union because it had become a playground for mediocre conservative tendencies.

Two Unrelated Fragments for Parallel Histories: Bogoljub Jovanović's *K55* and Zora Petrović's *Flying Nudes*

There is a unique painting kept in the Belgrade Museum of Contemporary Art, which is still owned by its creator, though he has never tried to claim it. Its title is *K55 1955* (fig. 13), and its creator, **Bogoljub Jovanović**, has maintained a silence about it that is of almost mythical proportions. The leading art historian of Yugoslav modernism, Ješa Denegri, observes: 'There is nothing similar to this painting in Serbian art of the 1950s, and there are no direct parallels to this painting, even in Paris of the time, where it was presumably made.' *K55* is an abstract painting consisting entirely of short, thick stripes of colour, positioned vertically and covering most of the canvas. The painting is unique for Serbian art of the period, for it demonstrates a way to achieve abstraction without relying on 'natural' forms that could then be reduced to abstract forms, as was the path chosen by other Serbian artists in the 1950s and promoted by the Belgrade Academy of Fine Arts, which revered this method as the only way to achieve and understand abstract form. Jovanović's painting is constructed as an abstract image without any reference to nature, and as such it appears for us as an emancipatory and radical gesture. Jovanović's other paintings are more or less unknown. We can only guess that after moving to Paris in 1953 he became acquainted with the work of the many noted artists based there, including the Russian emigré Nicolas de Staël, who understood that paint alone is able to suggest physical density.

Jovanović may well have explored paint textures, the tension of individual strokes, and the use of the

palette knife to drag and pull the paint into thick lines. But his systematic way of constructing the surface of the painting by covering it with repetitive strokes is quite unique. How this artistic discovery later evolved remains a mystery. Jovanović's Parisian episode was very brief, and in the mid 1950s, he left for New York, a sign of just how aware he was of the new impulses across the Atlantic. His New York story, however, has not yet been uncovered. Jovanović eventually returned to Belgrade but refrains from any contact with the art scene. One of the duties of Serbian art historians is to try to unearth the facts behind this myth. The existence of *K55* had little influence on how we understand modernist art in Serbia, since no one has taken a similar path, but it is, nevertheless, a work that continues to engage our theoretical curiosity. If Jovanović represents an artistic gesture that went unnoticed by the dominant mainstream of the 1950s, we might also mention some established artists who in their career created work not fully acknowledged or understood within the standards of the time, or whose personal life stories were obscured by moralistic norms.

A series of large paintings, executed mostly in 1959, by **Zora Petrović**, an artist who was well known even before the war, reveal a glorious conclusion to a rather academic artistic career. Although these paintings, which include *Njih dve u igri* (*The Two of Them Playing*) 1959, *Zrele žene* (*Mature Women*) 1959 (fig. 20) and *Dva lebdeća akta* (*Two Hovering Nudes*) 1959, develop an expressionist artistic language that does, indeed, reflect a significant tradition in Serbian art, they also seem to reject any consideration of academic standards. Frantic gestures, intense brushwork, and occasional drips of paint create an amazing intensity of surface, while the modelling of the figures disregards aesthetic norms, especially in the depiction of the female body. Petrović painted these works as she was approaching the end of her life — a life that for the most part remains in the shadow, primarily because of the public's unwillingness to come to terms with her sexual orientation. She did not come out as a lesbian, and no art historian has dealt with the implications of this public secret. By observing her own ageing body and spending time in solitude (her biography makes no mention of any public appearance by Petrović in 1959), she discovered, towards the end of a life beset by illness, a new and unrestrained method for exploring her sexuality. Attempts have been made to infer such sexual exploration in the appearance of symbolic objects on

her canvases: red flowers on white paper, red circles with white edges. But one gets the overall impression of a playful yet dramatic existential response to the deterioration of the body, thus revealing Petrović as an artist who prefigured the critical interest in the representation of gender and sexuality that would come to the forefront only in the 1970s. At the same time, these canvases signify, for Serbian art, 'the return of the figure against the ground of abstraction', in a way similar to the work of Georg Baselitz in the West European context. In my view, the fact that we can discover tendencies in one rather isolated art community that are similar to those which will shape certain future phenomena in international art practice is of crucial importance. The local art establishment's inability to appreciate the full significance of these paintings had the effect of obscuring a mature artistic vision that had made internationally relevant discoveries.

The Prehistory of the New Art Practice: The Private 'Noartistic' Life of Dimitrije Bašičević-Mangelos

The dominance of 1950s socialist modernism was not significantly challenged until the end of the 1960s. The continued strength of the modernist mainstream was confirmed by the opening of the Museum of Contemporary Art in 1965. Dissenting voices were heard only in anti-modernist circles, sometimes with explicit right-wing implications, which promoted a return to pre-modernist modes of perspective in painting and fostered the trend towards fantastic imagery, which became the quintessential anti-socialist artistic myth (with the Mediala group as pivotal). There was no strong radical movement in Serbian art before 1970, but the stimuli for such a break were coming from other regions in Yugoslavia. The most significant of these came at the end of the 1960s with the Slovene collective OHO, while the most 'invisible' influence came from the work of the Zagreb-based art historian Dimitrije Bašičević-Mangelos. Before 1968, this work had been, indeed, literally invisible. Bašičević's family story is rather symbolic: his father, Ilija Bosilj was one of the key figures in 'naïve painting' in Yugoslavia and the subject of a huge theoretical controversy. The family lived in the small town of Šid, west of Belgrade, which was famous because Sava Šumanović, the greatest Serbian pre-war painter had been killed there by Ustasha forces during the war. Bašičević studied in Zagreb and wrote his doctoral dissertation on

Šumanović. He went on to contribute a number of important theoretical writings and participate in some crucial art events around the Gorgona group, which, in both the 1950s and 1960s, gave rise to a far more radical and innovative contemporary art scene in Zagreb than in Belgrade. Throughout all these years, Bašičević had been working on a certain 'clandestine' artistic project, which he had started during the war, when he was in high school. Affected by the tragedy that surrounded him, he began to write short poems in his notebooks, which subsequently took the form of art books where he would inscribe lines and words in white across pages saturated in black ink. (fig. 11) He made similar works on blackboards and school globes, which, taken together, formed an imaginary classroom as a place of trauma and edification — a site where the notion of *tabula rasa* emerged as an artistic space that suggested a kind of condensed suprematism combined with a Magrittean way of using words.

This approach prefigured the pre-conceptualist visual articulation of poetry in the work of Marcel Broodthaers, with whom Bašičević can be compared. These works (*Les Paysages, Anti-Phones, Nonstories, Les Exercises*, etc.) led him to develop the theoretical notion of noart, a principle of radical negation: 'to negate the picture by writing it with words, to negate the word by painting it.' Bašičević used the pseudonym Mangelos to distinguish his private artistic project from his public role as a critic and curator. The first artwork by Mangelos that almost appeared in public was his 'design' for an issue of *Gorgona*, a magazine published in Zagreb from 1961–6 which represented the most significant artistic endeavour in Yugoslavia at the time. Each issue was a special project by a single artist, and Mangelos proposed that his contribution would be an issue of *Gorgona* that would not be published. In a characteristically ambiguous and ironic way, he later 'lamented' that this issue was never made! The first appearance of a work by Mangelos in an exhibition space was in Belgrade's Atelje 212 in 1968, when the curator Biljana Tomić included his work in the exhibition *Permanent Art*, and later in four exhibitions of visual poetry. Mangelos had his first solo show in Novi Sad in 1972. His influence on artists in the 1970s, as well as the 1980s, was never straightforward, but his unique spirit and intelligence provide Yugoslav conceptual art with a missing thread that may help us in constructing an 'alternative' history of art in Yugoslavia beyond the dominant academic status quo.

The Break: The Early Years of the Students' Cultural Centre in Belgrade and Independent Artistic Groups in Subotica and Novi Sad

The creation of the Students' Cultural Centre (SKC) was the result of student protests in 1968. As a way of pacifying the young generation's growing discontent with any form of authority in the socialist system — which had increasingly revealed cracks in the economy, as well as in the fragile harmony among the national identities — students were given a cultural venue as a way of channelling their political dissatisfaction into marginal cultural experimentation.

SKC opened in 1971, and that same year there were a couple of exhibitions that brought together a number of young emerging artists. Eventually, an informal group of six artists was created, which comprised Marina Abramović, Neša Paripović, Raša Todosijević, Zoran Popović, Gergely Urkom and Era Milivojević. Most of these artists had already been friends during their student years in the late 1960s and were already fully engaged in confronting the academic system. Probably the most outspoken and theoretically minded of the group was Zoran Popović, who later described the artistic and political situation they found themselves in as characterised by two tendencies. On the one hand, there was the demand that art in a revolutionary society should be socially beneficial as part of a general obligation to build socialism. On the other hand, there was the demand that art's only real obligation should be to explore, exclusively, the formal issues of artistic practice: 'As a generation emerging on the art scene, we found ourselves between two ostensibly opposed thoughts that were both socially established.' In other words, this generation of artists was the first to recognise the various dissident formations in Serbian society as integral, almost constitutive aspects of the governing structures. They were the first to consider the relationship between art and politics in a third way. In a sense, this entire artistic event signified the first form of a cultural critique to come from the left (although many of the people involved would not have called themselves 'leftist'), advocating fundamental changes in the social role of artists and the inclusion of real life in artistic practice. Whereas in Belgrade the main target of the rebellion was the Academy of Fine Arts, which shows that it was still impossible to disregard the academy's symbolic weight, the New Art Practice, or conceptual art, appeared simultaneously in Subotica and Novi Sad, two cities in the northern

region of Vojvodina. Here it developed in a way more closely related to new forms of social behaviour that were fully independent from any official institution and inspired by the hippie movement and its influence on the general lifestyle and political orientation of the younger generation.

Chronologically, the first art movement of this kind appeared in Subotica in 1969, when the Bosch+Bosch group was formed, and then later in Novi Sad, with the KôD group. The practice of all these groups went mostly unacknowledged at the time, but we should mention the crucial role some art critics and curators played in initiating and promoting this radical break with the past, primarily Biljana Tomić and Ješa Denegri, as well as Dunja Blažević, Jasna Tijardović and later Bojana Pejić. For the first time, art in Serbia escaped its self-imposed isolation and started communicating with the international art scene. SKC not only served as a laboratory for local artists, as well as those from other parts of Yugoslavia, it was also an important meeting point for the international art community. The Belgrade scene was characterised not only by the performance art of Abramović, Todosijević and Milivojević, but also by the analytical conceptualism of Popović and Urkom, as well as by the most sophisticated synthesis of both these orientations in the work of Neša Paripović. It is difficult to single out the most significant events of the period, which can be located roughly between 1971 and 1977. For the sake of this overview, I will mention four art events that had, or may have had, a significant influence on the understanding and discourse of art that emerged at this time.

Bálinth Szombathy's *Lenin in Budapest* 1972 (fig. 64), dealt with the issue of ambivalence in artistic and political gestures. Szombathy, a founding member of Bosch+Bosch, carried out many projects (which may be classified both as land art and 'analytical art') that aimed to erase the line between art and life by fully understanding the concept of dematerialisation and the central position of the artistic process as opposed to the final outcome. *Lenin in Budapest* is just one of these projects, but it may be singled out for its unacknowledged effect of positioning political issues within artistic behavior both at the time and especially later, in the 1980s. The project was documented in a series of photographs of Szombathy carrying a placard with the image of Lenin through the streets of Budapest in 1972. To display this image in an environment saturated with representations of this

icon of communist revolution seems a superfluous gesture. An identical image was carried in state-organized rallies celebrating the socialist utopia in every corner of the Soviet Bloc. Szombathy's action, however, was an individual, not a collective action, and this in itself may be regarded as subversive. But straightforward subversion was not the aim of the event. Instead, it presented an ambivalent gesture that was difficult to decode in the political milieu of the time: was Szombathy celebrating Leninism or was he mocking it? It now appears, he was doing neither; rather, this was a gesture of individual identification with the dominant ideology that was controlled and organised not within the system but from outside. The action appears as a 'legitimate' but superfluous statement of enthusiastic identification with an ideology that the ideology itself cannot deal with. From today's perspective, we can say that Szombathy prefigured an artistic strategy that was later developed in the activity of Neue Slowenische Kunst (NSK) in the 1980s: an exaggerated identification with an ideological system suspends its efficacy since the system does not know how to deal with the gesture. In my view, art and film in the late 1960s and early 1970s in Eastern Europe was able to baffle ideological norms not through direct subversion (which usually provoked instant repression) but by discovering fissures that could not be straightforwardly interpreted by the ideological apparatus.

Rhythm 5 1974 by Marina Abramović (fig. 81) was one of a series of performances in which the artist tested the limits of her own body, thus establishing herself as one of the most radical body artists of the time. As with her other *Rhythm* performances, Abramović gave a detailed description of the procedure, stressing the relation between artistic intention and the uncontrolled result. In *Rhythm 5*, she set fire to a wooden construction in the shape of a five-pointed star, then cut her hair and nails and threw them into the burning star, and finally, entered the burning star herself. Afterwards she described the effect of this action: 'I don't realise the fire has consumed all of the oxygen as I lay down. I lose consciousness. Because I am lying down the audience does not react. When the flame touches my leg and I still don't react, two persons from the audience enter the star and carry me out. I am confronted with the limits of my body and the performance is interrupted.' This event happened as a part of the *April Meetings*, an annual festival of 'expanded media' or 'new art' presented at SKC

(1973–8) that brought together many internationally renowned artists. Witnesses of *Rhythm 5* say that one of the people who rescued Abramović was Joseph Beuys, which certainly added to the drama (though more reliable witnesses say it was Radomir Damjanović Damnjan). As the only artist in the 'group of six' who 'specialised' fully in body art, Abramović did not focus on the ideology of dematerialisation but rather on identifying her own body as the material through which spiritual or archetypal energy can be evoked in the traditional form of the ritual. As Bojana Pejić rightly observes, 'In her art she opposes the separation of the body and the mind which marked the Western/European tradition, which has always privileged the *ratio* ... S/he tries to empty the mind, either by positioning the body in a state of total quiescence or by the repetition of a violent gesture or action, in order that the body and mind can become one.' In her most risk-taking piece, *Rhythm 0* (fig. 77), performed the following year in Naples, Abramović took the ethical and mythical principles of her practice to the ultimate extreme, combining the quiescence of her body with the public's potential for violent gestures that the artist cannot control; thus, she achieved a zero degree of artistic intention and directly exposed her body to the choices made by the collective drives of 'others'.

Was ist Kunst, Marinela Koželj? 1976 (fig. 90) by Raša Todosijević is one in a series of the artist's performances entitled *Was ist Kunst?*, and a key work that marks the conclusion of an artistic trajectory. Todosijević was one of the first artists to make a break with a certain pathos that encapsulated the New Art Practice when its initial radical impulse reached the point of no return. The group of six artists had never been an organic whole, but by 1976–7 they reached a kind of ideological disillusionment, and some of them decided to terminate all their activities in SKC and continue in different directions; Marina Abramović met Ulay and soon after embarked on a very successful international career; Urkom left for England and stayed there; Popović became more involved with theorising the political implications of this practice and the sense of failure of certain leftist myths that transcended it; Milivojević, who had always held a unique position within the group, continued his explorations of the mathematical structures of archetypes; and Paripović had yet to create his finest works, in which he investigated lateral artistic strategies using the extraordinary means of his

own face and body. Raša Todosijević had a different, more cynical temperament, and his sense of disillusionment served as fuel for edgy and challenging work which took him into the 1980s and reached its peak in the early 1990s with his *Gott liebt die Serben* installation series. *Was ist Kunst?* may be understood as an ideological pre-figuration of this series, but it had greater influence on the art projects of NSK in Slovenia than on the Belgrade art scene of the 1980s. We only know about this series of performances because, luckily, there is a tape of the one with Marinela Koželj. One of the misfortunes of the 1970s in Serbia is that many works remained undocumented and can be reconstructed only from the memory of their participants and spectators. This performance consisted of a forward facing, motionless and seated woman who becomes the object of interrogation and abuse by the artist who repeatedly shouts off camera: 'Was ist Kunst?' The close-up of Koželj's face in the video document enhances the effect of intimidation and arrogance, and the very length of the video makes the performance arduous for the viewer, too, due to the traumatic 'real-time' transmission of the event. This work uses certain traditional artistic matrices, such as the dialogue between artist and model (who, 'naturally,' is female) and between the intention and interpretation of artistic achievement. Its crucial accomplishment lies in its investigation of the politics of art (not political art) by focusing on the inability to interpret art, which breeds agitated behaviour. If conceptual art began with such heroic definitions as Kosuth's 'Art as an Idea as an Idea', it ended with the single tormenting question: 'Was ist Kunst?' — pronounced in German, of course, because what other language could so unmistakably evoke the legacy of totalitarianism?

N. P. 1977 1977 (fig. 92) by Neša Paripović is an 8mm film that shows the artist walking and running through Belgrade. His route is not structured by the urban grid of streets and sidewalks, but follows an imagined trajectory. Paripović takes an idiosyncratic walk that knows no barriers; he crosses fences, climbs roofs and jumps over balconies. The urban topography is a *mise-en-scène* for the self-representation of ephemeral and 'nonfunctional' behaviour. As in other works by Paripović — which always deal with the issue of the artist's self-representation achieved in discreet and 'modest' ways without appealing to the romantic myths of self-imaging that were still revered in the mainstream art system — the body's inner rhythm is confronted with social and environmental structures.

The camera records the moving body, but it does more than just document the event; it also structures it while striving to master the movement along the lengthy linear route. Paripović deconstructs the linear narrative of film by reducing it to the linear action of moving the film's protagonist forward through the setting. With *N. P. 1977*, Paripović has accomplished a significant return to the very origins of locating the conceptualist artistic act within everyday behaviour, a return to the situationist models of *dérive*, the technique of moving hastily through varied environments as a condition of constructing the relations of an individual towards the structures of urbanity (through the notion of 'psychogeography'). Every Paripović work is, in the words of Miško Šuvaković, 'an image of an overall conceptual and media matrix of a certain period ... a tendency to explore and discover the mature language of Belgrade conceptualism.'

Two Ways to Understand What Happened in the Eighties: Mileta Andrejević in New York and the Armory Show in Belgrade

It would be misleading to draw a direct parallel between the destinies of conceptual art in the West and in Yugoslavia. It is difficult to speak of a developed art market and gallery/museum system, which conditioned a return to painting, as happened in the West. But this is exactly what did happen, along with the adoption of the postmodernist theories of Eco, Baudrillard and others. What is more, as Bojana Pejić quite rightly points out, the Yugoslav socialist gallery and museum system also embraced postmodernist, mostly neo-expressionist painting with enthusiasm and immediately started acquiring and historicizing such work. But what made the art scene in Belgrade dynamic, and not just trendy, was the collapse of boundaries between high art and the emerging popular culture, as represented by 'new wave' rock music and underground clubs (especially Akademija, which was situated in the very basement of the Belgrade Academy of Fine Arts). Events in the underground music culture were fuelled by artistic potential, and looking back, it seems that the most emblematic artist from the beginning of the 1980s was the photographer Dragan Papić, whose work managed to capture the spirit and 'look' of the times.

Papić was the driving force behind a project involving young musicians whom he assembled in the group Dečaci (The Boys), which later became the

extremely successful new wave band Idoli (Idols). It was the early songs and TV clips of this band that introduced retro principles into art practice through the ambiguous evocation and celebration of some of the formalist and ideological manifestations of the Russian avant-garde and the utopia of socialism. But, if we want to find a typical market-oriented Serbian artist of the 1980s, we have to look, not in Serbia (despite the presence of some commercially successful Belgrade artists in that period), but in New York, which, of course, was the right place to be. Apart from Marina Abramović, there is only one other artist born and educated in Serbia whose name regularly appears in various institutional directories of international artists, and that is **Mileta Andrejević** (fig. 117). 'Who?' many in Serbia might ask.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Mileta Andrejević belonged to the same circle of artists as Mića Popović. Like others, he spent time in Paris but neither remained there nor returned to Belgrade. Instead, he moved in the mid 1950s to New York, where he became the protégé of Richard Bellamy, whose Green Gallery at the time featured Oldenburg, Rosenquist, Segal and others who would later be represented by Leo Castelli. Andrejević's pop art works were mentioned in Lucy Lippard's classic survey of the subject, *Pop Art*. In the 1960s, Andrejević moved out of these circles and began studying the Old Masters, such as Poussin and Vermeer, and teaching painting technique, which helped him to hone his skills through the very slow process of painting with egg, oil, and tempera, as well as to refine his own classical style. During the 1970s, his canvases attracted private collectors, but it was in the early 1980s that the prices of his paintings rocketed. 'Romantic realism', as this approach to painting was labelled, was a mixture of a Poussinesque style and a contemporary setting: all his scenes are located in Central Park, with New Yorkers engaging in athletic and cultural activities. His figures assume classical poses and are associated with characters from Greek myths, such as Acteon, Icarus, Daphne and others. These paintings fit with the most conservative trends in art criticism, supported by big institutions like the Metropolitan Museum, which wanted to put the art of painting back on the market. It was Hilton Cramer, especially famous for the journal *New Criterion*, who gave Andrejević a major boost by writing a long review of his work in the *New York Times*. Theorists of postmodernism embraced his 'classical sensibility,'

and Charles Jencks wrote that he evoked a 'timeless vision of contemporary life' and reminded us that, along with modern life and technology, 'Americans still pursue the Arcadian dream.'

This Serbian emigré sincerely believed in this dream, and his retro vision was shaped by his own life, which consisted solely of daily walks from his apartment on one side of Central Park to his studio on the other. It would be easy to dismiss him as a mere 'tool' of conservative art criticism. But if we wish to discuss connections 'with the Western art process', then it is fair to say that Andrejević found himself in the midst of an artistic trend. Not only his studied technical excellence (it took him around six months to produce a painting), but also the fact that his paintings went straight to the market when they were finished (when he died, the only canvas found in his studio was the one he was working on at that time) gives him a significant place in the attempts of conservative critics to revise exclusively modernist histories of twentieth-century art.

While the New York art market blossomed, Belgrade witnessed an unprecedented event, *The International Exhibition of Modern Art (The Armory Show)* (fig. 125), which had in some distant past been held in New York. Works by Duchamp, Picasso, Matisse and Kandinsky — as well as by Lichtenstein, Johns, Kosuth and others — were exhibited in 1986 in the Salon of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade. The project did not employ any mystery, for clearly the works were neither 'originals' nor 'forgeries', but rather 'genuine copies', some of which had not yet even been made, since they were dated 2013 or later. In the lecture 'Walter Benjamin: Mondrian 1963–1996', given also in 1986, the status of the copy was rehabilitated: an original has only the features of an original, whereas a copy has features of both an original and a copy. This key series of art projects, which took place in Serbia during the 1980s, was not associated with any particular artist but with other similar projects, such as *The Last Futurist Show 0.10*, which was held in a Belgrade apartment in 1985, and Gertrude Stein's *Salon de Fleurus*, which can still be visited at 41 Spring Street in New York.

These projects are linked with the work of a conventionally untrained artist, **Goran Djordjević**, who in the late 1970s started making copies of famous works of art, as well as his own hilariously bad high-school painting *Glasnici Apokalipse (Heralds of the Apocalypse)* copy 1980. These projects provoked many radical

discussions about originality (and 'other modernist myths'), especially given that they appeared in circumstances that were quite remote from the artistic and ideological milieu that had shaped Western art history, the art market and modes of institutionalisation. All these projects demonstrate the possibility of making radical artistic gestures at a time when the radicalism of the 1970s had reached an impasse through aesthetisation and institutionalisation. By observing the trend for a return to traditional painting, and by working on the 'un-artistic use of a traditional artistic medium,' as Slobodan Mijušković put it, Djordjević created a vacillating form of cultural subversion: 'If my attitudes may seem radical to some, I must say that they are first of all an expression of sympathy with intellectual anarchism that is, unfortunately, not far from being utopian, considering that the true power of Tradition and the Institution is incongruously and discouragingly big.' The awareness of the power of the Big Other used to be the most unshakable stumbling block for both the institutionalisation and radicalisation of artistic space in Serbia. For Djordjević, it became a central point of departure for a rigorous art project of international significance.

Out of the Collapse: Some Events in the 1990s

The political situation in Serbia in the 1990s has been widely discussed. Inevitably the art of that period has been seen through the prism of war, ethnic cleansing and political ploys. Rather than structuring a narrative for this period, I will mention four works from the many I wrote about during that time. These works were also related to some significant art events. The first was originally shown at the Vršac Biennale of Young Artists in 1996 and the next year at *Manifesta 2* in Luxembourg. The next two works were produced for *Murder*, the Second Annual Exhibition of the Soros Center for Contemporary Art in 1997. The fourth was first shown at the exhibition *Konverzacija* in Belgrade in 2001.

Tanja Ostojić

Personal Space 1996

A performance in which the artist stands motionless, naked, and covered with white marble powder.

fig. 188

A very rare example in contemporary Serbian art of a work that has avoided the cynicism of artists of her

generation, who are caught between their inability to alter political events and their disavowal of any kind of torment inflicted upon them by these circumstances. In this performance Tanja Ostojić has critically evoked visions of the body from the medieval spiritual tradition and has combined two aspects: *nuditas naturalis* and *nuditas virtualis*. This performance exposes the body simultaneously as a human condition of nakedness, either being a sign of vice or a sign of humility, and as a symbol of innocence and the raiment of the soul. In a position where the onlooker fixes his/her gaze on a body vulnerably exposed, she or he witnesses not only a mute statement of the indisposition of an artist to act within a hostile environment but also discloses the broader image of woman's body in art history as a sad affair of symbolisation and manipulation... Reduction to a virtual body of a woman/child/alien is a disturbing and poignant sign of a desire to be born again, as pure, empty of thoughts, free to depart from material conditions.

Zoran Naskovski

Voice of the Hand 1997

Video installation, sound and image of a hand rubbing the top of a wet glass.

fig. 189

The often-used concept of *abjection* in recent art depends on a specific stage of Western societies: an ultra-conformist milieu inhabited by the 'hyper-bourgeoisie' in an illusion of total aseptic purity. At the same time, this milieu is also absorbed by media imagery of disease, war, famine, violent threats of 'the others'. Representing 'impurity' becomes a means of endangering the symbolical structure, and, by these representations, art reminds us of fragility and the limits of the body, the body that becomes the only connection between the 'viewer' and the image, the only identification between 'us' and 'them'. Although he is very aware of these currents in contemporary art, Zoran Naskovski is an artist working in a different social and cultural climate: a society quite literally far from the 'aseptic image', but a society in which purification rituals are more perverse, and manifested through rituals of erasure up to a point of disappearance. These rituals erase traces; all the information disappears. And what is most important, the 'justifications' for these erasure techniques are never in the particular hygienic eagerness of the

performers of these rituals, but in a frivolousness and carelessness that makes everything disappear, including the ritual itself.

Milica Tomić

XY Ungelöst 1997

Video installation with two projections; the date, '28.03.1989', which appears at the beginning of the tape, refers to an atrocity committed by Serbian police in Kosova.

fig. 183

In order to re-create the incident, which did not happen in front of any watchful eye, apart from the two intersected gazes of the victims and their executioners, Milica Tomić invited people around her, mostly members of the Belgrade art community, to pose in shabby clothing dating from the mid-1980s, in order to attribute individual symbols to each and every ethnic Albanian murdered in this particular incident. These garments were an actual reconstruction of the original clothing worn by the murdered citizens, i.e. Tomić recreated these clothes from family photos of the victims, which she managed to obtain. When inviting her 'actors', she purposely adopted a method of restricting her disclosures about the content of their actions in the work. The method was based on her insight into the particular political orientation of her actors, i.e. upon the recognition of their political allegiances. With those she knew had taken a clearly anti-nationalistic position, she explained in detail her request for that person to identify with a murdered Albanian; those who 'wouldn't mind' (the majority of her actors) she informed about their roles but claimed the inexplicit political orientation of the work; finally, those who would have objected to this idea because of their nationalistic attitudes were in effect manipulated by the artist and were trapped by an invitation to appear in an art work — and who can decline that? Apart from making this an unintentional 'revenge' on those who in effect supported the state of affairs in Serbia; those who more or less silently authorised crimes committed in the name of protecting Serbian national interests, Milica Tomić exposed the dominant belief in art as an autonomous sphere unaffected by social and political circumstances. According to this belief, art that was supposed to provide consolation in social and political crisis, to be a mask of traumatic political identifications and relations. With *XY Ungelöst*,

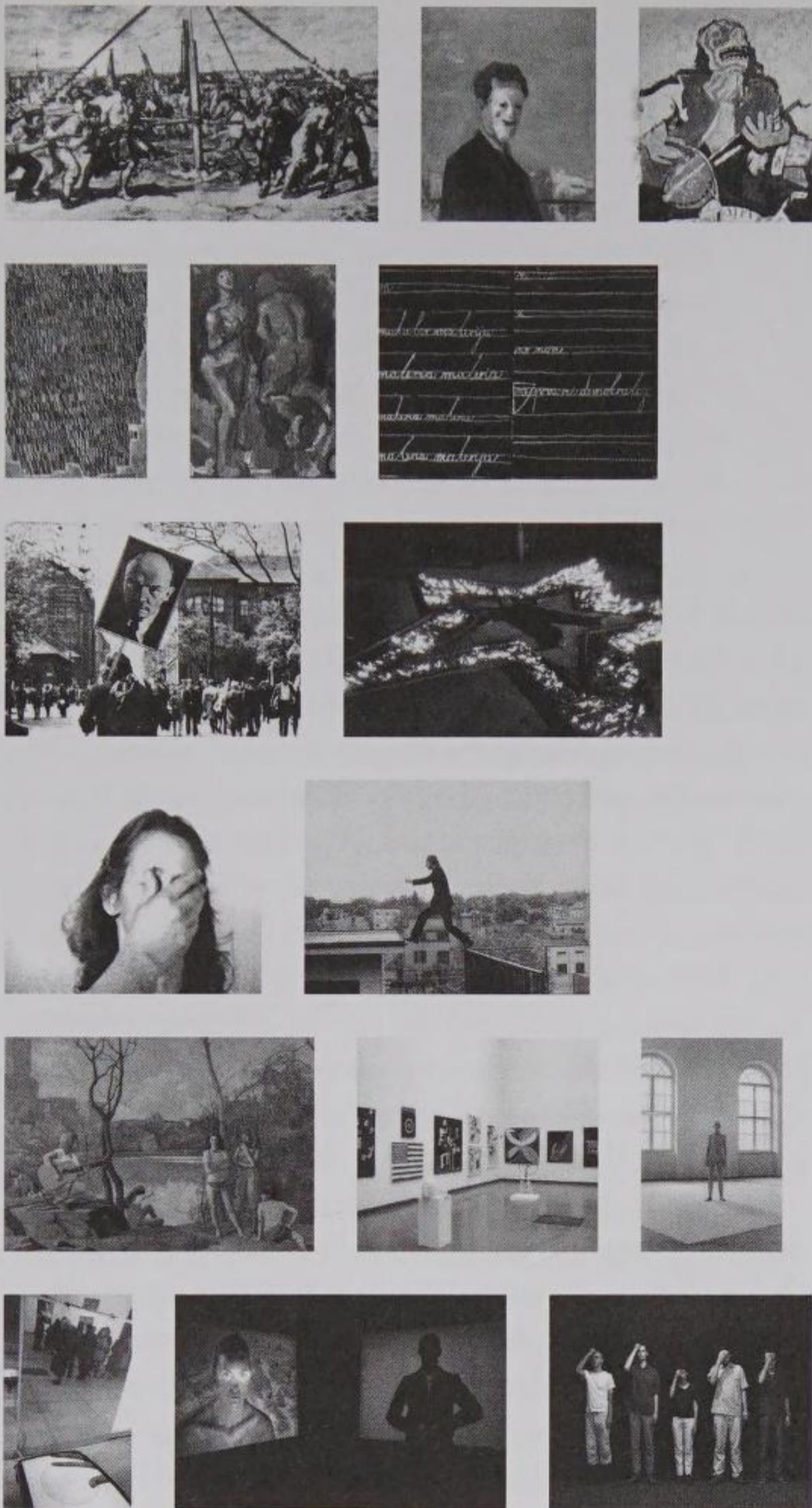
Milica Tomić pursued an opposite direction: this video installation operates precisely with the very content of a political trauma.

Vladimir Nikolić

Rhythm 2001

fig. 219

Five people are filmed standing on a stage whilst they repeatedly make the Christian-Orthodox sign of cross, following a four-tact techno-music beat. Whether religious rituals will fully replace communist rituals, and whether the only thing worse than communism is anti-communism (to quote one Polish intellectual), is a matter of political attitude. But, what is in fact striking in this powerful video work is that it brings us back to one of the first formulas of ideology written in the seventeenth century by Blaise Pascal: kneel down, move your lips in prayer, and you will start to believe. Ideology is in material practices, it resides in bodies and their rituals, and Vladimir Nikolić makes these rituals redundantly overachieving.



From left to right and top to bottom:

- Boža Ilić *Driving a Borehole in the Terrain of New Belgrade* 1948
 Mića Popović *Self-Portrait with Mask* 1947
 Petar Lubarda *Guslar (The Fiddler)* 1952
 Bogoljub Jovanović *K55* 1955
 Zora Petrović *Mature Women* 1959
 Dimitrije Bašičević-Mangelos *Les paysages de tabula* 1953
 Bálint Szombathy *Lenin in Budapest* 1972
 Marina Abramović *Rhythm 5* 1974
 Raša Todosijević *Was Ist Kunst, Marinela Koželj?* 1976
 Neša Paripović *N.P.* 1977 1977
 Mileta Andrejević *Apollo and Daphne* 1981
The International Exhibition of Modern Art (The Armory Show) 1985
 Tanja Ostojić *Personal Space* 1996
 Zoran Naskovski *Voice of the Hand* 1997
 Milica Tomić *XY Ungelöst — Reconstruction of a Crime* 1997
 Vladimir Nikolić *Rhythm* 2001

Indexing and Mapping Modern and Postmodern Art in Serbia after 1945

Miško Šuvaković

Indices and the Map

I have selected eleven artists and two critics that demonstrate certain key features of contemporary art in Serbia from 1945 to 2000. These were my criteria:

Formal inventiveness and timeliness *vis-à-vis* Western modern and postmodern art.

A clearly conceptualised position *vis-à-vis* the local (real-socialist, self-management, late-socialist and post-socialist) context and *vis-à-vis* international (East European, West European and American) artistic and political context.

The characteristic and controversial biography of an artist or critic in relation to private life, public politics or the art world.

These criteria might have included some other artists, such as: Bogoljub Jovanović, Koloman Novak, Slavko Bogdanović, Mirko Radojičić, Slobodan Tišma, Miroslav Mandić, Slavko Matković, Katalin Ladik, Radomir Damnjan, Raša Todosijević, Gergelj Urkom, Group 143, an anonymous artist, Nenad Petrović, László Kerekes, Srdjan Apostolović, Tanja Ostojić, Marija Vauda and Nikola Pilipović. However, choice is always a fleeting tactic and involves adopting certain positions that have specific consequences in relation to the act of choosing.

Ilija Bosilj

(b. 1895 — d. 1972)

fig. 56

Ilija Bosilj is the pseudonym of the farmer Ilija Bašičević, who started painting in 1957 at the age of 62. Bosilj was born in Šid, Serbia in 1895, where he died in 1972. He was the father of the acclaimed art historian

and director of the Museum of Naïve Art in Zagreb, Dr. Dimitrije (Mića) Bašičević (b. 1921 — d. 1987), who from the late 1940s to the late 1980s worked under the pseudonym of Mangelos as a mysterious proto-conceptual and proto-retro-avant-garde artist. Ilija Bosilj was a self-taught artist. His work was an exceptional anomaly in Yugoslav naïve art, as there are no similar examples of such a radically resolved flat, anti-illusionistic and minimal form. His art works appear to have sustained the strong influence of early archetypal abstract expressionism and Informel. On the formal level these paintings are based on flat pictorial symbols, composed on an emphasised and subtly defined surface. Thematically, his paintings depict regional mythology and fantastic projections of the mysteries of nature. The 'Bosilj Affair', in which the authenticity of Bosilj's creativity was contested, is well known. Ilija Bosilj was directly or indirectly accused of painting under the direct influence of his son Dimitrije, in other words that Dimitrije Bašičević-Mangelos actually made his paintings. Bosilj then demonstrated his painting technique publicly, before the media.

Ilija Bosilj displayed his works during his lifetime and posthumously, at many independent exhibitions: Galerija Radničkog univerziteta Đuro Salaj, Belgrade 1963; Galleria del Deposito, Genoa 1964; Izložbeni salon Studentskog centra, Zagreb 1965; Haus Nield, Frankfurt am Main; Galerie Neuhaus, Munich; Salon hotela Ambassador, Opatija 1967; Bols Taverne, Amsterdam 1968; Galerija slika Save Šumanovića, Šid; Galerie Hilt, Basel; Galerie Mokum, Amsterdam 1969; Centar za kulturu, Vukovar 1972. One of the most significant philosophical treatises on modern art in Yugoslavia is devoted to the work of Ilija Bosilj, written by Dimitrije Bašičević-Mangelos and published under the title 'Moj Otac Ilija — Nacrt

za antimonografiju' ('My Father Ilija — Draft for an Anti-Monograph,' 1976–7; published in *Dimitrije Bašičević-Mangelos, My Father Ilija — Draft for an Anti-Monograph* 1995).

Ilija Bosilj's naïve art resolved flatness in an explicitly modernist way, which was virtually inconceivable for most art academic circles in Yugoslavia in the late 1950s and 1960s. His work remains enigmatic in its authenticity and originality representing the modernist controversy of art and life. It belongs to the unusual, and both culturally and artistically intriguing, Šid circle, which includes the cubist and neo-classical painter Sava Šumanović (b. 1896 — d. 1942), his son Dimitrije Bašičević-Mangelos, and Bosilj himself.

His work may be considered in the light of naïve art, Serbian and Yugoslav artistic modernism of the 1960s, and that of artistic and cultural theories of Mangelos.

Ivan Tabaković

(b. 1898 — d. 1977)

fig. 25

Ivan Tabaković, a painter, was born in Arad, Serbia in 1898. He was educated at academies in Budapest, Zagreb and Munich. In Munich he attended the School of Hans Hoffmann, a precursor of abstract expressionism. Tabaković was a founder of the critically oriented post-avant-garde group *Zemlja* (Earth) in Zagreb in 1929. He left behind a major art opus characterised by the development of modernist figurative fantasy. He had two important innovative periods that set him apart from general Yugoslav art production. The first period corresponds to the founding of the group *Zemlja*. This was defined by critical, grotesque figurative painting that conforms to the *Neue Sachlichkeit* and is expressed as a radical criticism of avant-garde madness and the modernist autonomy of art. One masterpiece from this period is the grotesque painting *Genius* 1929. His other important period was 1955–77 when, parallel to his classical, lyrical modernist works he created photomontages, interventions and collages entitled *Fenomenologija ili izvori likovnog istraživanja i stvaranja — Analiza i fotodokumentacija* (*Phenomenology or Source of Artistic Research and Work — An Analysis and Photodocumentation*) 1955, *Skriveni svetovi* (*Hidden Worlds*) 1960–8 and *Život, misli i snovi* (*Life, Thoughts and Dreams*) 1964–77. From the perspective of national

art history, these works are seen as marginal within his output. In fact they represent radical and experimental examples of the study of a painting's semantics and the borders of art media.

In short, many of Ivan Tabaković's works demonstrate how a national modernist artist re-examines the limits of modernism, its ideology, metaphysics and poetry through his own work. His paintings from the *Zemlja* period are an example of the reconstruction of grotesque semantics that has a political and critical character in relation to society. In East European art history his photographs, collages and interventions can be seen to have anticipated the collage-montage technique of neo-Dada and the neo-Dadaistic destruction of modernist metaphysics. In addition Ivan Tabaković demonstrates how a great painter confronts his public 'I' with the different and deferred subject of a modern sceptic where he engages in self-reflexivity and self-criticism of his own work and the horizon of art.

Oto Bihalji Merin

(b. 1904 — d. 1993)

fig. 1

Oto Bihalji Merin was born into a Jewish family in Belgrade in 1904. His elder brother, Pavle Bihalji (b. 1889 — d. 1941), was the founder of the left-wing Nolit Publishing House and initiator of the avant-garde left-wing journal *Nova Literatura* (*New Literature*) (founded in 1928). Bihalji Merin was not an artist but an art theoretician, a critic, modern art historian, revolutionary, writer, and political and cultural figure. He attended the Hochschule für Angewandte Kunst in Berlin, and studied philosophy, aesthetics and the history of art at Berlin University from 1924–7. During this period he came into contact with Brecht, Walden, Grosz, and Heartfield. He also became a left-wing activist. He witnessed the burning of books by the Nazi's in front of Humboldt University in Berlin in 1933 with his wife Liza, whose surname Merin he added to his own. He attended the Kharkovsky Congress in 1930 at which socialist realism was established and canonised. He lived as an émigré in Spain, France and Switzerland. Penguin publishers in London published his first book, *Modern German Art*, under the pen name Peter Thoene in 1938. He published the book under his own name with the title *Savremena nemačka umetnost* in Yugoslavia in 1955. After World War II, during the period 1945–9, Bihalji

appeared in Yugoslavia as a theoretician and advocate of socialist realist ideas. After 1953, following a journey to the West, he returned to the study of modern art. In the 1960s and 1970s he published articles and books about the West's high modernism (Picasso, Klee, Beckett), but also about naïve art, the art of the Third World, the relationship between art and technology (art and science, kinetic art). He was among the first in Yugoslavia to publish articles on neo-Dada, pop art, kinetics, neo-constructivism. He published both in Yugoslavia and the West, for instance he wrote alongside Apollonio, Argan and Jaffe in the anthology *Art Since 1945* 1958. Over time his approach to art evolved into a great modernist, universal humanism.

Clearly art is not only represented by artists, but also by the theoreticians, critics, activists and historians. In summary, the life and work of Oto Bihalji Merin points to paradoxical dramatic disruptions, turns of events and contacts that may be conceived as important characteristics of 'modern times.' A Jewish intellectual hailing from a small Serbian culture who came into contact with German and international avant-garde culture and became its representative. He then joined the political left and changed from being an avant-gardist to a propagator of socialist realism and then to a representative of party policy in the culture and art of socialist Yugoslavia. All this was followed in the 1950s by a sharp turn towards humanism and high modernism and its universality.

Oto Bihalji Merin was and remains the only art theoretician from Serbia and Yugoslavia to publish numerous works in the West in the context of the then-topical dominant modernist discourses.

Olga Jevrić

(b. 1922)

fig. 19

Olga Jevrić was born into a bourgeois family in Belgrade in 1922. She is a sculptor, a pianist and has also studied art history. Following a short period in which she worked as a figurative sculptor, Jevrić turned to radical abstract solutions using a vital sculptural form. From the 1950s to the present day, Jevrić has been developing a consistent line of research into the relationship between static and dynamic sculptural forms, with minimum changes. Paradoxically, her work emerged at the point of confrontation between sculptural vitalism (e.g. Henry

Moore), an informal study of sculptural matter, existentialist culture and an emerging structural epoch of model and modelling. Her sculptures, being scale models of large public monuments that were never erected, were mostly small or medium in size. Her work is fundamentally and dominantly modernist, since it is based on the belief that sculpture is an autonomous system of study, behaviour and existence. Her way of thinking is aimed at the logic (phenomenology, syntax) of sculptural form and at the autonomous effects that emerge from a work of art itself as an expression of the existence of an artist. She always refers to herself as a sculptor, not a sculptress, suggesting a transcendental power and the effects of a superior, grand and heroic modernist gesture. In the second half of the 1950s she appeared on the international scene, exhibiting her work at the 29th Venice Biennale in 1958, and then showing her works in solo exhibitions at the Notizie Gallery, Turin in 1958 and at the Drain Gallery, London in 1961.

Olga Jevrić is the only artist to achieve all essential aspects of high modernism in Serbia in sculpture. In other words, over a period of several decades and in a radical manner she fulfilled the ideals of a heroic, abstract, universal gesture, the phenomenological essence of a work of art and the self-critical innovation within the framework of autonomous form. She achieved the existentialist principle of a high modernist artist concentrating for most of her life on one ideal form (or family of forms), in much the same way as Henry Moore and David Smith on the international scene, and Gabrijel Stupica and Julije Knifer in the fine arts in the former Yugoslavia.

Leonid Šejka

(b. 1932 — d. 1970)

fig. 15

Leonid Šejka was born into a family of Russian émigrés in Belgrade in 1932. He graduated from the School of Architecture. Šejka founded the anti-modernist group Mediala (1955). He died of a brain tumour in Belgrade in 1970. Šejka's work is highly controversial and for this reason best represents the environment in Serbia after the Informel period. He developed his work in three directions:

- 1 Reconstituting a wide range of figurative painting from new figuration, pop art and

Austria's fantastic realism to a neo-classical return to Renaissance ideals in composition, craftsmanship and presentation.

- 2 Moving towards a neo-Dada approach to run-down and urban edifices, fetish figures and, most importantly, the study of an artist's activities which guided him toward happenings.
- 3 Moving towards theory, in which he hoped to establish and renew a discourse on the metaphysics of painting.

His work (paintings, objects, campaigns, theories) was paradoxical because he juxtaposed procedures leading to both hyper-modernist works (white paintings of warehouses and dumps, object packaging, campaigns/happenings) and anti-modernist works (paintings composed in the spirit of Renaissance art, founded on perspective, with a developed and sophisticated manner of presenting objects).

In the late 1950s, Šejka prepared campaigns entitled *Proglašavanja (Proclamations)* April 1958, in which attention was shifted from a performed and completed work of art to the very process of performing, acting and behaving. He exhibited his works independently in Belgrade, at Galerija grafičkog kolektiva 1958; Salon muzeja savremene umetnosti 1965; Galerija Kolarčevog narodnog univerziteta 1966; Galerija grafičkog kolektiva 1969. Internationally he exhibited in Munich (Galerie Harald Kress 1967), Zurich (Galerie La Fourmière 1968, 1970), Basel (Galerie Katakombe 1969) and Bern (Galerie des Atelier-Theatres 1969 Galerie Toni Gerber, 1970).

Leonid Šejka's work controversially addresses the circumstances in which socialist realism prevailed, when abstraction (Informel), moderate modernism (or a socialist aestheticism of stylised modern intimist art), an anticipation of the neo-avant-garde (neo-Dada, Fluxus, concrete poetry, happenings, new figuration) and a conservative anti-modernism related to provincial mysticism (fantasy) all met on the Serbian scene. He anticipated the abandonment of painting and sculptural media in favour of the construction and use of objects, and pioneered happenings in Serbian and Yugoslav art. He created diverse works with a multitude of inconsistent and mutually conflicting examples. His entire output may be regarded as a portable and nomadic meta-work.

Vladan Radovanović

(b. 1932)

fig. 14

Vladan Radovanović was born in Belgrade in 1932. In 1958 he graduated in composition from the Academy of Music in Belgrade. He was a founder of the Mediala group (1955) and one of the editors of the pro-Fluxus magazine *Rok (Rock)* 1969. In the past fifty years his work has been developing in several parallel directions:

- 1 drawings and translucent paintings (1959-68) with which he resolved the problem of abstract painting,
- 2 records of dreams (1953-68) based on verbal and visual texts,
- 3 polymedia projects (1958-75) with which he resolved the problem of blending individual works and their media,
- 4 introduced media (1957-8) projects based on the creation of new media, such as 'tactisons', or objects for haptic reception,
- 5 ideographs or personal signatures (1957-8) with which he labelled certain conditions and events in a graphical manner,
- 6 developing figures (1957-8) that deal with systems of iconic symbols and their transformations,
- 7 syntheses of words, sounds and figures in two-dimensional space (1954-73) with which he achieved complex verbal-vocal-type visual works,
- 8 syntheses of words, sounds and figures in three-dimensional space (1958-75) which are based on three-dimensional verbal-vocal-type visual objects,
- 9 syntheses of words, plastic objects, the tactile and kinetic (1971-6) which are an examination of complex multimedia relations and sensory effects,
- 10 one-way translations of words into pictures and two-way translations of gestures and words (1957-8), which correspond to the proto-conceptual studies of relations between different systems of rendition,
- 11 improvisation *vis-à-vis* streams of consciousness (1954-7) which document an artist's stream of consciousness with vocal-visual means,
- 12 projects of events that discuss one's own

creation, anticipate a spectator's reaction and work with reality and time (1955-7) and which may be comprehended as a proto-conceptual study of the action, act and artificial behaviour of an artist, for example, a fundamental and pioneering work is the performer-conceptual work *Četiri pričinavanja* (Four Apparitions) 1955-6, suggestions for doing (1956-7), and concepts of actions by artists working with the body as an object (1956).

The use of the body as the object and subject of an artist's interventions with which he anticipates certain presuppositions of body art,

15 a self-examining medium (1973-6), a group of conceptualist projects in which an artist establishes a relationship between a working medium (tape recorder, photograph), the theoretical propositions of work and the effect of working with a medium, etc.

Together with his art Radovanović developed a complex body of theoretical work, which in phenomenological and semiological analysis established discussions on contemporary experimental art from neo-Dada and Fluxus to conceptual art and the postmodern.

In the closed, socialist realist culture of the 1950s, the promising 1960s and the relatively open 1970s, Vladan Radovanović anticipated, discovered and studied the principal procedures of the neo-avant-garde (actions by artists, the relationship between the visual and the verbal, the status of an object, the status of an artist's body) and conceptual art (the role of the concept, the relationship between a concept and an artist's actions, the role of mental presentation, the function of speech theories in a work of art, the status of a work of art, auto-reflection). He organised his work as a continuous study and discovery of border areas, media, effects, concepts and forms of behaviour or thought that stand apart from the customary and standard borders of art. His work was self-reflexive and self-theorising in all its phases. Through it he pointed to procedures of creation and reflection that criticise and surpass the autonomous aestheticism of high modernism.

For this reason he is the only true neo-avant-garde artist in Serbia.

Biljana Tomić

(b. 1940)

fig. 79

Biljana Tomić, born in Novo Selo, Serbia in 1940, lives and works in Belgrade. She is a critic, poet, gallery manager, custodian and art theoretician. She has a degree in art history and managed the Atelje 212 Gallery (1968-9) and the Student Cultural Centre-SKC Gallery (1976-99), which exhibited internationally-oriented art ranging from process art and Arte Povera to conceptual art and the postmodern, all in an environment of socialist self-management. She started her work in the mid-1960s, promoting a 'new' or 'permanent' art (visual poetry, process art, Arte Povera) and establishing direct contact and co-operation with the Italian Arte Povera and the Slovenian OHO group. She dealt with a specific type of visual poetry, *type poesy*, based on the graphic use of letters and the relationship between letters. Her critical and theoretical work is linked to the acritical critique of Germano Celant and the activist critique of Achille Bonito Oliva.

In other words, she defines the activity of critics as close to the activity of artists. This means that she is a critic who initiates new art phenomena, organises artists and co-operates with them in the realisation of artworks, exhibitions and international presentations. Her critical discourse developed in two directions:

- 1 Critically when documenting and promoting the work of an artist both verbally and in articles.
- 2 In her writing she creates metaphor, collage and montage texts. These are not an interpretation of artworks, but rather exist in parallel to them and/or develop a discourse with them also in relation to international trends.

Chronologically Tomić worked closely on the Yugoslav scene with the OHO group (1968-71), the Družina v Šempasu group (1971-1990). She founded the Group 143 (1975-80), initiated a postmodern turn in painting in Belgrade in the early 1980s, initiated the creation of the 'new Belgrade sculpture' in the mid-1980s and promoted performances and video art projects. She has been involved in major exhibitions (Venice Biennale 1986, 1993 and 1997, and *Documenta 8*, 1987).

Biljana Tomić is selected here because she places the work of a critic close to that of an artist and

participates directly in articulating and promoting the art world. She has initiated and promoted all major art movements on the Serbian art scene, from the Arte Povera of the mid-1960s to the conceptual and performance art of the 1970s, the eclectic postmodernism of the 1980s and 'art in the age of culture' in the 1990s. She has established close contacts and has co-operated with major international artists and critics at the outset of their careers, such as Pino Pascali, Gemano Celant, Achille Bonito Oliva, Daniel Buren, Joseph Beuys, Klaus Rinke, Harald Szeemann and Urlik Rosenbach.

Her critiques have the character of an artistic text that accumulates and explains the atmosphere of the art being created.

Neša Paripović

(b. 1942)

fig. 92, fig. 110

Neša Paripović was born in Belgrade in 1942. He graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Belgrade and completed his graduate studies under the instruction of Krsto Hegedušić in Zagreb. He began his work as a painter in the second half of the 1960s with post-minimal (hard edge) painting. In the early 1970s he began working in conceptual art (drawings, photography, films, videos, texts). He participated in conceptualist groups: an informal group of six authors from Belgrade (Abramović, Milivojević, Paripović, Popović, Todosijević, Urkom) 1971–3 and Group 143 from 1976–80. Paripović developed a specific type of conceptual art, researching the status of a painter and the art of painting by means of photography, film, video and text. For him the fundamental problem of art is the life of an artist who doesn't paint, but who documents or interprets his or her own behaviour and existence as an artist. Conceptual art to him was the media meta-language of painting and the painter in the art world. In that sense he anticipated certain fundamental problems of neo-conceptual art, such as: the use of autobiography in the work of an artist-painter, an intimation of psychoanalytical themes (sublimation, transfer, expression, censorship, exhibitionism), a demonstration of a painter's opinions and media (photography, film, video), a presentation of sexuality, and the indexing and mapping of relations between the public and private life of an artist.

Paripović is relevant here because he doesn't present conceptual art as meta-linguistic formalism,

but as a meta-media method of interpreting the daily private and public life of a painter. He places his work between media, because he works with film and video on the problem of the status and function of the painter and the act of painting. He rejects all fundamental modernist alignments: originality, utopianism and positivism, and points instead to the artist cynic who leaves an indistinct border between art and life. The viewer doesn't know whether the artist is depicting his art with his life or his life as a painter with his art.

Marina Abramović

(b. 1946)

fig. 77, fig. 81

Marina Abramović was born in Belgrade in 1946. She graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Belgrade and completed her graduate studies at the Masters Workshop of Krsto Hegedušić in Zagreb. She left Yugoslavia in 1974 and today lives in Amsterdam. Abramović worked actively with painting, conceptual art, body art, performance art, environmental art and installations. She co-operated with Ulay (F. Uwe Laysiepen) on joint performances from 1975 to 1988, and displayed her work at large international exhibitions and festivals including the Edinburgh Festival 1973, the 37th Venice Biennale 1976, *Documenta 6* 1977, 10e Biennale de Paris 1977. She has realised performances in the Sahara, Thar and Gobi deserts (1980–3) and the Great Wall of China (1988). Abramović has lectured at many art academies in Europe.

Marina Abramović is a radical pioneer of body art and performance art in Serbia, Yugoslavia and Europe. She was one of the first Yugoslav artists to confront the artistic problems of expressing, and exploring sexuality, the naked body, perversity and sadomasochism. She is the most successful of the Serbian, Montenegrin and Yugoslav artists working internationally in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Vladimir Kopicl

(b. 1949)

fig. 74

Vladimir Kopicl was born at Đeneral Janković, Serbia, in 1949. He graduated from the School of Philosophy in Novi Sad where he continues to live and work. Kopicl has been involved with conceptual art, poetry, translation, and literary and theatre critiques. He was

a member of the Novi Sad conceptual groups Grupa (E and KôD from 1970–3. Kopicl realised the most radical examples of textual and analytical conceptual art based on a linguistic analysis of the language of art. He exhibited with KôD at the 7e Biennale de Paris 1971 in the Conceptual Art section with Art & Language, Robert Barry, Victor Burgin, Ian Burn, Braco Dimitrijević, Joseph Kosuth and others.

The work of Vladimir Kopicl shows that conceptual art in Yugoslavia developed simultaneously with Western conceptual art 1968–73. His work is a rare example of a radical, analytical, meta-linguistic analysis of art, artists and the language of art. His studies were established as an expansion of the language of art with the languages of literary theory, hermeneutics, Wittgenstein's analytical philosophy, and Cagean work on language.

Bálint Szombathy

(b. 1950)

fig. 64, fig. 157

Bálint Szombathy was born in Pačir, Serbia, in 1950. Together with Slavko Matković he founded the conceptual group Bosch+Bosch in Subotica in 1969. The group was active until 1976 and artists of Hungarian, Serbian and Croatian descent from Vojvodina co-operated in it. The group began its work with an attempt at neo-avant-garde experimentation (visual poetry, campaigns by artists, interventions in nature and urban areas), linking the experiences of contemporary Western art with the Hungarian historical avant-garde, primarily through the work of avant-garde artist Lajos Kassák. Szombathy worked with visual poetry, land art, semio-art and conceptual art in the 1970s and 1980s. He was an artist-campaigner and through his work established legal and illegal channels of communication between Western art, the relatively open Yugoslav art of the 1970s and the closed underground art of Eastern Europe (primarily Hungarian, but also Czech and Polish art). He wrote about art, from conceptual semio-analysis of language and art media to cultural theory and critiques of social current affairs. He completed an important political and critical work on East European art entitled *Lenjin u Budimpešti* (*Lenin in Budapest*) in 1972. Following the disintegration of the SFRY (Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia) in 1991, he started complex projects that depicted and expressed the processes of disintegration of the

political and symbolic modes of Yugoslav institutions, as well as of civil war and the assumption or loss of ethnic identity. In a political sense his work in Serbia in the 1990s, together with that of Raša Todosijević, was the only explicit project that indexed post-socialist conditions and circumstances at the end of socialist Eastern Europe. He created performances and installations.

In summary, the work of Bálint Szombathy developed from the confrontation of Hungarian and Serbian cultures (avant-garde, neo-avant-garde) in Vojvodina in the late 1960s and 1970s. His art and criticism were aimed at linking East European neo-avant-garde and conceptual groups and artists in Eastern Europe in the period of socialist realism. He introduced conceptual art procedures (semio-analysis) during a conceptual art period (1968–73) and applied them to the status of the East European context. Szombathy presented works (performances, installations) with which he mapped the processes of post-socialism, the disintegration of the second Yugoslavia and the establishment of a transitional period.

Dragomir Ugren

(b. 1951)

fig. 190

Dragomir Ugren was born in Bosanska Krupa, Serbia in 1951. He graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Belgrade and now lives and works in Novi Sad. He is the director of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Novi Sad and was the editor of the *Projekta*^t magazine for art theory and criticism (1993–2001). Dragomir Ugren began his work during the eclectic post-modern revival of painting, at the time of post-analytical painting, neo-expressionism, the trans-avant-garde and the new Informel. In the 1990s Ugren radically reduced painting to a flat surface and, by using painted strips as elements, he built complex geometric (cold, non-referential, arbitrary) visual systems. He changed from painting as a finished work to painting as an element in the construction of a spatial installation in the second half of the 1990s. In fact, he builds spatial visual texts. Installations of his paintings become a kind of branded network of objects at the centre of the world, and as such are examples of neo-conceptual simulations and a deconstruction of the modernist ideal of 'absolute painting,' 'aesthetic formalism' and 'fetishistic objects without functions'. Ugren's work is also characterised

by a criticism of eclectic postmodernism and its arbitrary allegories, and points to the alienated non-referential presence of an object at the centre of the world. In that sense his work has the characteristics of the 'modernism after postmodernism' phenomenon. This phenomenon may be interpreted as an effort to revive certain modernist strategies at a time when eclectic allegorical postmodernism has become academic. But it's also possible to interpret 'modernism after postmodernism' as a phenomenon specific to post-socialist societies — because in most post-socialist cultures, and particularly in self-managed Yugoslavia (1945–91), there were only a few examples of high modernism, the dominant models were strategies of 'moderate-impure-modernism' or 'socialist aestheticism'. With the establishment of a pluralist art world in late postmodernism, certain authors resorted to the simulation, reconstruction or deconstruction of high modernist models and dogmas (monochrome, pure form, tautology, reductive shapes, patterns, neo-geo schemes) by pointing to the fact that such radical models were no longer possible in an age of socialist realism.

Dragomir Ugren represents a model of East European artist (like Dimitrije Bašičević-Mangelos, proto-conceptual artist and director of the Museum of Naïve Art in Zagreb, or Miodrag B. Protić, art theoretician, abstract painter and founder and director of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade) that combines his activity as an artist with that of director of a museum and organiser of artistic life.

Dragomir Ugren pursues a consistent criticism/self-criticism and deconstruction of eclectic expressive Postmodernism. In his paintings he asks important questions about the relationship between the art of post-socialism and historical high modernism.

Gera Grozdanić

(b. 1955)

fig. 203

Gera Grozdanić was born in Vršac, Vojvodina, in 1955, and graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Sarajevo (Bosnia-Herzegovina). Today, he lives and works in Vršac. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, he worked in the sphere of analytical painting. In the 1990s he then moved towards large installations. In Vršac, which is at the border between Serbia and Romania, Grozdanić practiced different activities, from representing the political opposition (under

Slobodan Milošević he was an opposition deputy in the local city assembly) to running a large exhibition space in the old Austro-Hungarian school Konkordija. He also produced provocative and complex allegoric-tautological installations that refer to works of Arte Povera, minimal art and eccentric abstraction.

The artist's life has unfolded in the closed world of provincial Vojvodina in post-socialist Serbia and his works are a drastic material and ideological reaction to such an environment and social identity. In the 1990s his works were built in the manner of the monumental pieces of the 'great masters' of postmodernism (Beuys, Serra, Kiefer, Kounellis) and cynically emerge as a confrontation of post-socialist regionalism and Western internationalism, i.e. the supremely sublime aestheticism of Western artists and the paradoxical cynical realism of post-socialist artists. His artistic position is therefore paradoxical — he creates works that could easily appear on the front cover of *Artforum*, but instead he displays them in his Konkordija gallery in Vršac, where he is considered by domestic critics an artist who represents a regional identity (the Vršac scene).

Tanja Ristovski

(b. 1969)

fig. 186

Tanja Ristovski was born in 1969 in Belgrade. She graduated from the Faculty of Fine Arts in Belgrade. She currently lives in Vienna, Austria. Her artistic career began at the end of the first half of the 1990s, on the wave of the reception of new British sculpture in Serbia. In the second half of the 1990s, Ristovski moved on from sculptural work to research material events, processes and situations in culture, exploring the manifestations and representations of artistic behaviour as a symptom of the everyday. She presents through different media her individual and subjective relationships towards space, time, interpersonal communication, food, national, ethnic or current existential identity, motherhood, etc. For instance, in the artwork *Meditation On Belonging* 1997, Ristovski's private performance in a neo-conceptualist manner, she wrote the phrase 'I do not want to belong' on her face. The work reflects the mental and behavioural condition of an artist living outside her country during the civil war. Her identity is that of a person without citizenship attempting to survive in a different culture, which detects traces of her non-

belonging in either her place of origin or her place of residence. The reasons for including Ristovski's work in this cross-section of modern and post-modern art in Serbia are the following:

- 1 She is truly representative of the art context in Belgrade in the 1990s because she works with behavioural matrices of identification in transitional and nomadic practices at the end of socialist realism.
- 2 She works with the models of art in the time of culture, that is, with practices where the anatomy of high art is destroyed and the artist presents the symptoms of everyday life or the mechanisms of social control and of the performance of the private and public subject within contemporary culture.
- 3 She represents that significant identity of the 'young' and 'contemporary' artist who lives and works outside the culture of her or his ethnic origin.
- 4 She is an artist who works with the phenomenon of 'women' and female behaviour in constructing and performing the cultural and social 'self'.



From left to right and top to bottom:

- Ilija Bosilj *My Painting with LPT* 1970
 Ivan Tabaković from *The Hidden Worlds Cycle* 1961
 Oto Bihalji Merin *Group Portrait with O. B. Merin*
 circa 1920
 Olga Jevrić *Complementary Form I* 1956
 Leonid Šejka *Proclamations* 1958
 Vladan Radovanović *Fijo-tan-bal Verbal-Gestural Work* 1957
 Biljana Tomić *Group photograph with J. Beuys and Family* 1974
 Neša Paripović *Poster-Messages* 1979
 Marina Abramović *Rhythm 0* 1974
 Vladimir Kopicl *Nothing Is Here Yet But Some Form ...* 1973
 Bálint Szombathy *Flags II* 1993
 Dragomir Ugren *Untitled* 1997
 Gera Grozdanić *The Leader* 1998
 Tanja Ristovski *Meditation on Belonging* 1997

The Situation of Visual Culture in Post-War Slovakia

Vladimir Beskid

If we want to draw a map of the historical and cultural developments of the last fifty years in Slovakia, it is necessary to state that these processes have been influenced by political upheavals and ideological pressure. It is possible to divide the period after 1945 into the time of real socialism (1948–89) and the start of democratic conditions (post-1989). It is also worth mentioning that the main part of this development took place in Czechoslovakia — a state common to the Czechs and Slovaks (1918–92), with the exception of a short period of fascism in the Slovak state (1939–45). A rough game played by colonisers and liberators, and the consequences of these social fractures and residues can be sensed in the Slovak environment, and this atmosphere of the aftermath is still perceptible on various cultural levels.

The main characteristics of the first period are the doctrine of socialist realism and the monumental propaganda of communist ideas that are not discussed in this text. In the confrontation with the official art scene, as well as the dialogue with Western tendencies, a hotbed of non-conformist art and alternative initiatives formed. The key phase for the Slovak version of modern art is undoubtedly the 1960s, which saw the rise of urban culture along with traditional iconic culture.¹ Compared to the imagery of fine arts and the preference for pastoral scenes with national accents in iconic culture, urban culture introduced a broader understanding of visual culture, including non-figurative trends and other types of creativity.

The second important issue during this period was the problem of Slovakia's peripheral position, as a frontier zone between East and West. Following the division of Czechoslovakia in 1993, Bratislava became the capital city, a metropolis of the local scene and a new centre that had traditionally occupied a peripheral position in our well-known 'inter-space' (space between

the East and West, between communism and consumerism). The characteristics of any peripheral culture can generally be described in the following ways:

- 1 The predominance of received rather than transmitted ideas and actions.
- 2 On the periphery, partial thinking prevails over comprehensive thinking, that is, fragmentation, partial formulation of problems and their conclusion are marginal to the main matrix culture.
- 3 The degree of openness of a system; the ability to communicate and exchange information and codes with other cultures or systems of values is affected.

Despite freedom of information in Slovakia, evidence of the peripheral character was still detectable on various levels (a small art scene, weak state-run institutions, the absence of a museum of contemporary art, the lack of private galleries and commercial activity, etc.).

After 1989 different processes took place with the following conclusions:

- A metaphoric and socio-geographical shift in identity: Central Europe moved from the East to become Middle Europe. It looked for independence and a new identity within Western and Eastern cultures and attempted to rid itself of the label 'East Bloc'.
- The acceptance of globalisation, consumerism and commercial spheres, where yesterday's ideologists were substituted with today's 'imageologists' (Milan Kundera's notion)² and a difficult and increasingly pressured balance had to be maintained: down

with Soviet dictatorship, welcome to 'Coca-Colonisation'.

- The expansion of new media, electronics and digital technologies took place. Developments were too fast for such an underdeveloped environment with slow circulation that considers painting as the genetic code of the European visual civilisation. However today's nervous system is connected by electronic media. All these developments led to the formation of a considerably hybrid environment, a wild jump from Absurdistan over Kaufland to Computerland.

Increasingly, we are confronted with the Western cultural (con)text and the process of its Hellenistic infiltration, where the 'cancer models' of never ending accumulation, entertainment and mass reproduction (of images) of the power pressure and desensitisation colonise the world. More and more we will be in the position of Gibson's hackers³ wanting to join the strong saturated medial and digital net in order to place our own intellectual software and visual information there.

It seems, that these processes of 'infowar'⁴ and 'iconoclash'⁵ keep accelerating. We have to build a new system of references, cultural networks (dispersion structures) in a European context, where strong centres form communication nodes with the possibility of reaching and transmitting to the weaker links in the chain. We have to reconstruct a history of modern and contemporary art with a contribution and acceptance that goes beyond borders. It seems that we have to build history in the approaching future.

Alojz Klimo

(b. 1922 Piešťany — d. 2001 Bratislava)

fig. 49

Alojz Klimo, the founder of post-war geometric abstraction in Slovakia continually developed his work from the mid-1960s onwards. It is important to note that between the two World Wars in Slovakia we have no recorded examples of non-figurative painting. Klimo brought a unique model of geometry with a reduction of shapes and signs, concentrated pictorial order and his own register of elements. His approach was about building the architecture of a picture, about a disciplined structure with a rhythm of lines and surface areas linked together in a rectangular plan.

This connection of the geometric shape and pattern, the rational structure and its emotional charge, the delicate subjective soft implementation gave a new quality to abstraction.

The polarity that characterises Klimo's painting can be described as: on the one hand a rational range of activity, on the other a psychology of lines and surface areas. Systemic thinking in the form of an enclosed picture structure and rhythmical composition covers the intuitive model of subjective copying of picture data, an individual expressive record — the calligraphic interpretation of a picture score. Thus a drawing — a linear skeleton is projected onto the rhythmical composition of colour fields. Occasionally there is an unusual positioning of crossing diagonals creating a specific dynamic within the basic static rectangular structure.

Alojz Klimo took up abstract painting after 1962 by stylising the urban environment and its details (*Town Street, Bridge* 1962). After 1966 he created compositions without these direct references and formed geometric compositions that were based on the square format and the idea of the 'picture window' resembling a city map; a grid of streets and blocks, town structures supported by black contours and a mechanical raster of imprints of found objects, collages of corrugated board, etc. (*White Square* 1966, *Structure* 1966, *Traces II* 1966).

This position culminated in the series *Crossroads* 1967–9, with the canvas divided by two cardinal diagonals and the image becoming a mosaic of shapes and surfaces as a result of the combination of different elements. In the 1970s the artist varied and modified this pictorial formula using rectangular versions (*Structure of Town* 1972, *Window* 1975–7, *Fragment of Town* 1976).

From the end of the 1970s he returned to the diagonal composition characterised by a more playful atmosphere, contrasts and sharp angles (*Fragment* 1979, a series of works titled *Movements* 1984–6, *Touches* 1986).

From the beginning of the 1990s Klimo created his own synthetic form of abstraction with inner harmony and balanced relationships, pure and peaceful colour fields and well-known subjects (*Window* 1988, *Squares* 1991, *Gates* 1992–3, *Surfaces* 1992–3).

At the end of the 1960s under the influence of the concrete art movement,⁶ Klimo also created some colourful kinetic objects the most important of which was the piece made for the 1970 Expo in Osaka, Japan.

Alojz Klimo's works represent a unique synthesis of non-objective painting in a form of brittle abstraction on the interface of geometric and expressive lines. Respecting the geometric structure of a picture and its subjective layering through soft linings and the overlapping of the colour surface are characteristics of the artist's work. Thus, Klimo represents an individual reinterpretation of geometric texture and pattern.

Milan Dobeš

(b. 1929 Přerov. Lives and works in Bratislava.)

fig. 76

Dobeš is not only the sole representative of op art and kinetism/kinetic art in Slovakia but was also the founder of these movements in the former Czechoslovakia. He made his first luminous-and-kinetic object in 1960 and his solo exhibition in Bratislava in 1965 was the first presentation of kinetic art in the former Czechoslovakia. In the second half of the 1960s Dobeš participated in many important exhibitions exploring constructivist and kinetic tendencies in the international context (*Art-Light-Art*, Eindhoven 1966, *Kinetism-Spectacle-Environment*, Grenoble 1968, *Documenta IV*, Kassel 1968, *ARS 69*, Helsinki 1969, 10th Bienal de São Paulo 1969 and Expo Osaka 1970). The luminous-and-kinetic works that he realised in collaboration with the American Wind Symphony Orchestra for their concerts of contemporary music (Toshiro Mayuzumi, Krzysztof Penderecki) for their USA tour in 1971 form a special chapter in the development of Slovak art.

Since 1960 Dobeš has elaborated on the programme of so-called 'dynamic constructivism' (a manifesto exists written in 1988).⁷ This body of work goes beyond traditional media and establishes a new sensitivity to our environment — a constructive and engineering aesthetic with the basic genetic code of geometry, an admiration for the beauty of discipline and the objectivity of science and technology. He defines a clear plain form, geometric order, mobility and optical illusions.

Dobeš's works follow two basic lines of development: there are the mobile objects and optical reliefs that remained the dominant and more significant area of work, and alongside there are the graphic works. The construction elements of his objects have become real light and its movement — their pulsing rhythm. Primarily, Dobeš deals with the possibilities of involving light and motion in his work,

and also with the aesthetics of the transformation of light through motion. He discusses this in his manifesto: 'motion and light have to become an inseparable aesthetically appealing part of the art object'.⁸ The apex of this process was a large-scale outdoor construction *Kinetic Tower* (Piešťany 1970) made from aluminium and steel that was also used as part of the performance (*Pulsing Rhythm XXII*) of moving light projections and reflections in the night sky organised by the artist.

As well as a series of luminous-and-kinetic mobiles, dynamic objects and sculptures (*Pulsing Rhythm II* 1962, *Movement of Light in Space IV* 1968, *Movement of Space* 1992), Dobeš has also made several optical collages, reliefs and vitrages (*Circles and Light* 1967, *Optical Relief* 1969–74, *Reflex* 1985, *Relief Vitraj*, House of Culture, Bratislava 1981). These visual systems are mostly built upon the principle of a central concave and mirror structure, or the principle of repetition of a simple element. They either work on a mechanical basis using a motor or in a more hidden way — by the inner vibration generated by participants moving around the structure generating an optical illusion (inner light, oscillation, visual reflexes of foils). Moreover, Dobeš mixes traditional technical tools and new materials (small motors, metal plates and foils, resin, mirrors, glass lens, etc.).

In the artist's graphic work, created since the 1960s in the spirit of op art, the basic composition has been based on a system of circles, mostly in black and white, and on their permutations and variations (*Black Graphic* 1969, *Variation* 1967). Since the mid-1980s Dobeš has created a new series of rotating serigraphy: sliding semicircular segments and their centrifugal rotation on the surface area, reducing his colours to red, blue and black (*Dynamic Constructivism* 1986–8, *Rotation of Circle* 1989, *Big Rotatio*, 1992).

Milan Dobeš has worked innovatively with the language of geometry and until now he has been the one of the few orthodox kinetic constructivists in Central Europe. In November 2001 the Museum of Milan Dobeš was opened in Bratislava.

Mária Bartuszová

(b. 1936 Prague — d. 1996 Košice)

fig. 130

The works of Bartuszová, with their integrity, compact programme and gradation, belong to the best sculptural production in Central Europe from the

second half of the twentieth century. Against the background of the tendencies of the 1960s she remained a representative of the classical attitude to sculpture and for many years focused on a particular issue. Bartuszová has developed a so-called organic sculpture and post-minimal attitude in contemporary Slovak sculpture. Her suggestive, introverted world of forms and elementary bio-forms have been inspired by natural elements (a rain drop, a nest, an egg, a grain, germination) and encompass the rhythm and rules of natural order.

The flow of energies in matter, and the fluid character of the sculptural shapes determined Bartuszová's thinking about materials. She pursues the secret of the birth of shape, the sinuosity of evolution and the irreversibility of extinction. The artist's primary means of expression became the contrasting of forces and principles: physical forces of pushing versus pulling, form versus contra-form (perforated sculptures), filling (volume) versus emptying (a shell), angular, geometric order versus fluency, artificial versus natural, etc. An important aspect of her work is that negative volumes (hollow, emptiness, a trace of volume) are as equal a part of the creative process as positive forms.

After finishing her studies in Prague in 1961 Bartuszová moved to Košice (she married the sculptor Juraj Bartusz). In the first half of the 1960s she developed the basis of her organic approach (*Raindrop* 1962–3, *Grain* 1965–76, *Germination* 1966–70) and had been searching for her own repertoire of forms trying various materials (plaster, bronze, aluminium). Between 1968 and 1970 she became an active member of the Czechoslovak group Club of Concretists. Influenced by the rational and geometric approaches of the group she created a sequence of geometrical aluminium reliefs based on one module and its rhythm (*Vertical Ripple* 1967, *Rhythmic Relief* 1968). A particular group of works were built from haptic plastic pieces. At the core of these works were a series of small biomorphic sculptures and plastic puzzles, which consisted of several pieces that connected to each other. She made a series of small sculptures specifically for blind children in a grammar school in Levoča (*Sculpture Symposiums I* 1976, *Sculpture Symposiums II* 1983).

From 1979 she made plaster sculptures with natural elements attached to the surface (stones, branches, sand, etc.). She also used plaster applied to stone to reproduce melting snow. Plaster casts are traversed and disrupted by branches, which grow

through them, or are constructed like fields (*Landscape II* 1983, *Untitled* 1984). From 1984 more post-minimal sculptures and fragile ovoid shapes appeared (together with the application of balloons in the process of sculpting), sometimes these works were subject to the process of tying as in a rope net (series *Untitled* 1984–7, *Homage to Fontana* 1987). Increasingly Bartuszová used deconstructed forms, contra-reliefs, negative volumes and shells (*Untitled* 1985–7, the series *Never-ending Eggs*, 1986–94) As she wrote herself: 'A negative shape is a print of a positive one, a print maybe even of that which already was but does not exist any more. Arrangement in layers or a fluent transition of positive into negative can probably evoke a feeling of time and space.'⁹

Bartuszová developed and experimented with several individual techniques and methods. Since 1964 she had been using the technique of casting plaster into plastic rubber materials (so called pneumatic forming), as well as pressure, or elimination of gravity, floating on water ('gravistimulation' forming). Plaster was no longer a preparatory material, but had become a dominant construction material, a mediator of artistic expression enhancing the action-like character of her work. The neutrality of white, of white material emphasised the pure spiritual dimensions of her work. Its fragility, vulnerability and temporary character again referred to natural processes.

Bartuszová remains a significant personality in Slovak post-war sculpture, a key figure who followed and structured her own programme of work — developing non-anthropomorphic sculpture throughout her career. The metaphor of the sculpture cell as a shell-like element of construction, a case, a conch, or bio-architecture overlaps with the perception of the cell as a vital unit, in the feel of environments — as membranes and pneumatic-architecture.

Jozef Jankovič

(b. 1937 Bratislava. Lives and works in Bratislava.)
fig. 50

Jozef Jankovič is a classical sculptor working in a non-classical figurative style. He is a sculptor of monumental parables about individual failures, defeats, losses and victories, as well as the crises and paradoxes of the post-war period.

Despite many periods of work, his main focus has always remained the human figure, the body confronting ideological power.

As a university student he participated in unofficial group exhibitions of the young generation that pursued the non-figurative expression of Informel (exhibitions entitled *Confrontations I–III*, Bratislava 1961–3). He made graphic works and drawings of dark structures, and his discovery of the poetics of objects resulted in assemblages and *objet trouvés*. These were a characteristic combination of materials and techniques; applying wood, metal, plaster, polyester, textiles and found objects (casts, gloves, shoes, furniture, textile, etc.) that he used as references to and substitutes for the human figure (*Prison VII* 1964–5, *Testimony VIII* 1965–6). It was during this period that his peculiar style of figuration, influenced by pop art and new realism (confronting the official sculptural doctrine) was formed and he started to portray man from the ‘reverse side’ — an estranged, empty creature without integrity, a victim, a deformed form, crippled and stigmatised, a shapeless body of scattered fragments and limbs — that created disturbing sculptural situations with gloomy atmospheres (emphasised by the frequent use of metaphors for confinement: a cage, prison, the cross, nets and cobwebs). In the following years the forms and shapes used by Jankovič changed, however, the general personal and social crisis atmosphere of his works persisted. In the 1960s the pieces constructed from fragments, torsos, casts of amorphous arms and legs without a trunk, powerless swollen forms, inflated atrophic muscles (*Spider’s Web* 1969, *Great Destiny* 1970) somehow culminated in the realisation of a large sculptural work *Big Fall* for the international exhibition *Danuvius 68* in Bratislava (for which he was also given the main award).

The question of sculpture as a monument in a public place forms another chapter in Jankovič’s oeuvre. In his monuments the main actor is not a hero with pathetic gestures, but a victim, an anonymous mortal confronted by power and superiority.¹⁰

During the period of normalisation following the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 Jankovič, who was excluded from the official art scene, chose a different strategy. He made a series of sketches and unrealised projects with an ironic and utopian flavour, in which he pointed to the conceitedness of the system and the ridiculousness of its representatives. These were cartographic schemes and proposals for an imaginary humanoid architecture in the form of threatening and laughable monuments and labyrinths (*Arabic Series* 1972, *Design of the Portable Pneumatic*

Agitprop Centre 1976, *Marching Block* 1978).

Since 1973 he has devoted himself to computer graphics, being one of the first artists in Slovakia to do so. The main theme of his graphic works was the composition of a figure and its gradual transition into a simple abstract or dissipated geometric form (*Icarus* 1974, *Expansion* 1980). After 1990, under the influence of Postmodernism and the political changes, Jankovič redefined his figurative programme of work including both his monumental, large-scale works and small-scale reliefs (*A Look Back* 1991, *Crucifix* 1993, *The End of a Paradigm* 1995).

Thus Jankovič continues to be a sculptor who is able to touch upon individual and social ruptures and models of change with sensitivity. He has produced a strong individual sculptural testimony reflecting the drama of human destiny, history, and political power structures.

Stano Filko

(b. 1937 Veľká Hradná. Lives and works in Bratislava.)
fig. 44

Stano Filko has been a complex creative personality, a type of eternal researcher representing a radical iconoclastic position, who formed an authentic art, an intellectual and emotional synthesis.

His way of thinking has always been conceptual and based on his own specific and rather complex systems. From this position he has set out on his numerous crusades and investigations into the field of fine art. Filko has gradually formed his own cosmology and new system of social relations that connect life and art, the personal and universal, local and international in various ways. He has always understood creativity as a ‘distilled idea’, a mental essence as well as an intellectual investigation. On the other hand, he sees the artwork itself as a raw product or an intrigue for communication, as well as a tool to actively involve the spectator in his environments. His works, with their ideological saturation, broad perspective and precise formulation of a given problem, possess both irony and mystification. Since the 1960s Filko has developed his own ‘psycho-phil(k)osophy’ and ‘context-art’, in which he investigates societal relations on three levels:

1. the third dimension: biology, the present, the colour red;
2. the fourth dimension: cosmology, the past, the colour blue;
3. the fifth dimension: ontology, the future, the

colour white, and a parallel system of seven spiritual spheres (chakras), energies and colours.

The following is a brief overview of the most important models and activities used in Filko's art since the beginning of the 1960s:

- Objects and assemblages (the cycle of Altars 1963-6) in which he collaged real objects: erotic photographs, crosses, country fair relics, nails, and entangled cords.
- From 1966 the first installations and environments were produced (Universal Environment 1966-7, Cathedral of Humanism 1968, White Environment at Documenta 7, Kassel 1982) forming a psychophysical synthetic space as an active environment for the spectator (using common things: mirrors on the floor, slides, radio, etc.); he was also making his first pneumatic environments (Cosmos – Environment I-II 1968, Wind-Hymn of Air 1970).
- He was a pioneer of Slovak conceptual art – The Happsoc Manifesto 1 from 1965 (with co-authors Alex Mlynárčik, Zita Kostrová) was a presentation of 'found reality limited in time and space', as a chain of events from 2-8 May 1965 in Bratislava. Thus non-stylised 'found reality, limited by time and space, acts through the power of its relations and tension'.¹⁴ Filko continued with his conceptual research and projects (to Happsoc IV 1968) reducing the works to a process, a report, or a text declaration while introducing his own concepts: prospect-art, project-art, text-art, which he recorded and drew on graph paper.
- The motives of the body, femininity, erotica and pornography (inflatable deck-chairs, feminine silhouettes on maps and textiles, 'love environments', the main topic being: Venus-Sheherazade) in such works as Love Room, 1965-6, Puffed Up Lounges with Feminine Figures I-V 1966
- At the end of the 1960s, Filko became fascinated by contemporary civilization and information, cosmic and space themes (e.g. city, urbanism, maps, unfeasible projects, rockets, rose bombs, gates, space

travel, monuments to civilization) – The Monuments of Contemporary Civilization I-X, project-art 1968-9).

- The programme manifesto White Space in the White Space 1973-4 (together with Miloš Laky, Ján Zavorský) that defines 'a demonstration of space' with impersonalised painting (made with a paint roller) on the 'endless surface area'¹² of a canvas similar to Malevich's 'world of pure sensibility'.
- During his emigration in the USA (1981-90), the artist produced large-scale expressive postmodern paintings using both sides of cardboard and canvas (Architrave/Teeth 1984-6)
- During the 1990s he made installations, site-specific works and short videos with computer animations (Pyramid – 5. Natural Elements, Vyšné Ružbachy 1998, the series Self-Portrait 1994-7).

In the second half of the 1990s Filko formed Fylkondreicka (with the young artist-rebel Boris Ondreicka (b. 1969)). This was a separate transgeneration unit with a new hybrid double-identity. Fylkondreicka successfully presented themselves through total installations in shared spaces that were always supported by a strong tension between their different personalities (*Together and Each Alone*, Bratislava 1997, *Sill*, Košice 2000).

The main concept of Filko's art and intellectual cosmology is to create an 'identity-ego-space', referred to as EGOQ.¹³ The artist has also been involved in forming authentic micro worlds and stories (therefore also dealing with his own personality: the enlargement of the letters of his name, its different transcriptions (Filko, Phylko, Fyilko, Phys), an archive of his own x-Rays, erasing his figure from photographs, a question of life and reincarnation (he has experienced two clinical deaths). On the other hand, he has been looking at international and global macro structures, even in the cosmos (spatial and utopian projects, the honours of technical civilizations, cosmonauts and the universe, the 3rd, 4th and 5th dimensions, etc.).

Stano Filko is a key artist in conceptual and post-conceptual positions in Slovakia, a unique phenomenon of post-war art. He is able to work objectively with information and data and to form synthetic artistic and social environments, into which he condenses his messages, doing so in a lively and inimitable way.

Julius Koller

(b. 1939 Piešťany. Lives and works Bratislava.)

fig. 46

Julius Koller occupies a special place in the strong wave that has formed modern urban culture and the development of non-traditional media connected with it. After 1965 he moved into the area of conceptual art — inspired by Duchamp's way of thinking. Rather than producing artefacts he preferred a multi-dimensional reality, the straightforward connection between art and life — dealing with, appropriating and redefining ideas and contexts, but at the same time also questioning information, art and the role of the artist in society. This attitude has become the basis of Koller's conceptual thinking in various ways. Thus he has gone beyond the limits of a traditional understanding and perception of art. However, he struggled to find a different definition for artistic creativity, as well as for his own position (anti-art). The best examples of his endeavours are the pieces: *The Glass of Clean Water* 1964 (from the series *Idea-Objects*) in which the artist presented a real glass of water; and the painting *The Sea* 1963–4, a picture with the hand written inscription 'sea' on a blue background.

Koller has preferred a broader definition of cultural events. His term 'cultural situations' refers to situations or cultural events that might form alternative channels of communication in different social environments: for example, his long-term involvement with amateur artists for whom he organised several workshops and lectures during the 1970s and 1980s.

A breakthrough in his career was the manifesto *Anti-Happenings* 1965¹⁴ in which he criticised the then 'trendy' happenings for their theatrical arrangement and directing of reality. He presented unspectacular ideas and activities based on an analysis of everyday life. He carried out, appropriated and documented everyday activities such as tourism and popular sports events, for example, tennis and table tennis matches (*Tennis* 1968, *Ping-pong Club J+K* 1970) in a sequence stressing the small shifts and changes in such activities. Since then he has prepared his tiny naïve-philosophical text cards and manifestos with letters from a children's printing kit. In these he declares his poor communication system. Since 1966 Koller has worked on the series *Culture of Waste*, an archive and series of presentations of painting tools and materials. So far he has worked with everyday objects, found items and materials that also reflect the social

condition and poverty of socialist times. Since 1968 he has started a series of *Anti-Pictures* in which he pulls transparent plastic or textile fabrics with patterns over the frame of the picture (a so called textextile). These pictures are sometimes completed with a small figurative motif that might be repeated *Anti-Picture (Raster)* 1969, *Anti-Picture (Football)* 1973.

Koller's main sphere of activity and ideas is the formation of cultural situations; to propose more effective communication between individuals and society. He considers the necessity of mutual interaction and experience as an attempt to change relationships and reality much more substantially and more persistently than the making of artefacts. The artist's emblematic sign for these cultural situations is the question mark — both the universal sign of questioning and his subjective mark of identity. This also functions as a symbolic and semantic sign of unknown territories and positions (*Anti-Picture (Question Mark)* 1969, latex on textile) and that which he varies and applies in different situations and public spaces.

Since the 1970s Koller has developed the project *U.F.O. (Universal Futurist Operations)* documenting certain artificially made (and also found) situations in which the deeper meanings of secret messages mix and interconnect with other associations and contexts. Most significant has been his series *UFO-nautist J.K.*, a series of self-portraits depicting him as a cultural alien. These are produced each year to document the passing of time. His working conditions befit his position as a stranger: Koller has worked in a small apartment and on its balcony while painting traditional pictures for sale.

In 1981–2 he prepared (in cooperation with Peter Meluzin and Radislav Matuščík) a series of unofficial actions and projects titled *Terrain* 1982–7, taking place in different public spaces in Bratislava. This was one of the most significant activities of the alternative Slovakian art scene in the 1980s.

At the beginning of the 1990s Koller worked closely with Peter Rónai, who occupied a similar artistic position. Along with Milan Adamčiak, they formed the group New Seriousness (active between 1990 and 1993). Their work together used reverse cultural and social situations within their own system of principles and code-signs — they used the sinus curve with its rich poly-semantic background and diverse, cultural-archaeological and ornamental references. Prior to this each of them used his own signature — Koller a question mark (?) and Rónai a

cross (x), as their principal signs of communication. In their joint performances (numerous events and installations) they radically demystified pathetic gestures, idioms, and slogans of the time. They successfully eroded stereotypes of the then current cultural dialogue, ideological and artistic representations (*New Seriousness*, installation, Bratislava 1990, *Inflow-Outflow*, anti-performance 1991, *Exercise*, action-environment, Bratislava 1992). From 1993 Koller continued working alone with the sinus curve (wave line) and applied it again to the canvas, with reference to national symbolic identity and colours (*Sign* 1994, *Signed Cultured Situation* 1997).

Koller has presented a significant alternative to official positions through the development of his own system of events, projects and operations in the cultural field. The hybridism and impurities of his creations and attitudes not only reflect the distance between his work as a traditional painter to make a living and his radical concepts, but show the specifics of local situations and the contribution to the global art scene.

Peter Rónai

(b. 1953 Budapest. Lives and works in Bratislava.)

fig. 160

Within the very broad spectrum of Peter Rónai's visual activities the dominant one has become video art; a focus on digital and electronic imagery. Rónai is multimedia artist, one of the pioneers of video art in Slovakia reflecting Slovak virtual reality (1994–7) and researching the language of media in a particular way.

Since the 1970s he has been influenced by Duchamp, the Fluxus movement, conceptual art and Dada-poetry, as well as several people from the then current Hungarian art scene. He has developed strategies in which he has posed a question about ever-growing life and art, a question about a new transcription and distribution of ideas, their commentary in anti-art strategies (from anti-picture to anti-video).¹⁵ His series of objects and installations reflect his intellectual position: *Dada Memorial* 1990, *Post-Duchamp* 1993, *Second-Hand Art* 1992, or the inscriptions 'art strike', 'no art today', etc.). His work is a process-based research into artistic communication and the formation of a mental zone (as an artefact), rather than a representation of ideas and codes. It is a rational idea-logy the main elements of which are creative linguistic games, scepticism, irony, paradox, the inversion of relations and gestures

of negation. Above all, his practice breaks down traditional aesthetic categories exceeding their frameworks and limits, and his pieces often have an intermediate character. The register of his activities is very broad: objects, ready-mades, anti-pictures, environments, texts, and photographs, later, video and interactive art. He occasionally works directly with text, linguistic games, ironic remarks, appropriations and quotations (*Tobey or not to be* 1988, *Gottbye* 1990, *MUTT R (in Hommage á Hommage)* 1991, *Cogito Ergo Kunst* 1994). Thus he has worked out a new cultural context pointing at the treachery of concepts, names and the contamination of present-day communication. When modelling ideas in space, he forms complex heterogeneous environments (post-installations) in which he selects and remixes ready-mades, objects, his earlier works and their reproductions from previous installations in a new system of signs, ideas and readings. Many of his installations and video works are made as site-specific works (*Message Saloon* 1992, *Alter Ego* 1993, (both in Bratislava), *Not Stand*, Graz 1993). Between 1990 and 1993, together with Julius Koller, he worked in the art group New Seriousness.¹⁶

Peter Rónai has played a principal role in establishing new media in Slovakia in the last two decades. During the 1970s and 1980s he worked with photography, producing numerous manipulations, assembles, collages and post-photography. Since the end of the 1980s, objects and installations (including video) have been dominant in his work. Characteristically, he has been using small LCD monitors — in most cases installed in an unusual situation and manner — offering new readings of cultural contexts. As part of a strategy of self-mystification and self-modification (his alter ego) he often inserts his self-portrait into his manipulations and morphing, and wittily inverts a conceptual message about 'art in the head' into the taunting remark 'head in the art' (*I+I=3* 1993, *Selfmutation* 1996, *Head XXII* 1996, *AutoReverse* 1997). Recently this game of hybrid identity has involved the spectator, who is followed by a camera and sees himself on the screen, 'trapped' in the installation (*Box* 1997, *In Medias Res I, II*, 1998 and 2003).

Peter Rónai occupies a significant place in working with and working out alternative forms of non-verbal communication and iconoclastic models of contemporary visual thinking. He brings new information by means of techno-images and video, in which he also relativises the role of art itself in contemporary society.

Ivan Csudai

(b. 1959 Svodov. Lives and works in Bratislava.)

fig. 175

Csudai, who is also a composer and musician, has been the main representative of painting in Slovakia for the last two decades. It is possible to observe in his development the shift of the image from postmodern pictures to computer-generated paintings.

Csudai entered the art scene in the second half of the 1980s, as one of the representatives of a strong young generation of painters. This was the beginning of neo-expressive postmodern painting, the renewed strength of this traditional media with archaic imagination, subjectivity, an explosion of colours and recitation, with the reformation of an iconic glossary of quotations, games and forms. As part of this wave, Csudai created his own style, with sharp brush lines over dark backgrounds. He has built a very personal mythological world full of magic atmosphere and demonic archetypal figures. From the background of these existentialist surfaces, strange figures, hybrid creatures and fragments emerged (*Patron* 1988, *Step* 1988, *Hot Landscape* 1989).

By the end of the 1980s this type of picture changed remarkably. Csudai left behind expanded colour for a more moderate, reserved style with reduced gestural expression. The artist's chosen system of pictorial signs and symbols — he started to appropriate nineteenth-century German book illustrations — appear with prudent contour lines and rough graphic drawing on the flat background of large pure single colour surfaces. The emptying of the picture surface becomes important, the process of reduction and the concentration upon specific signs and elements. At this time Csudai's painting takes on a metaphoric and metaphysical resonance and he further develops this way of thinking in integrated cycles (*Hanging Points I–X* 1993, *Velvet* 1994, *9 Easy Pieces* 1995–6, *Cabinet of Tears* 1999–2000).

In his recent series Csudai generates a chosen motif through a computer programme, filters it and then projects it back onto the surface of the canvas. Using a consistent contour line and digital drawing, he manages to energetically articulate his verified iconographic glossary. His main motifs are skulls, teddy bears, the mouse, the silhouette of a monk, Saturn, a teardrop and interior details. The precision of the design and the abruptness of painting overlap, as do the ambivalence of the context and the variety of readings (*The Year of the Bear* 2002, *Evolution* 2004, *Mouse and Death* 2004).

Csudai forms inimitable and mysterious sequences of nostalgia, pictorial meditation and metaphysical poetics. He builds private narratives and dreamy ballads, where objects and stories somnolently pass through time in an everlasting melancholic dance. The viewer is confronted with this situation and left to cope with it. Thus, within the traditional medium of painting Csudai models his own peculiar iconic world, always introducing a new iconography, drama and innovation.

Roman Ondák

(b. 1966 Žilina. Lives and works in Bratislava.)

fig. 178

In his work, Roman Ondák moves between drawings, objects, installations and more recently performance. In the 1990s he became a typical representative of the young generation whose practice involved critical thinking, work with double-coding and who occupied a neo-conceptual position.

Ondák prefers analytical work practices — the formation of an idea through the abstraction of certain notions and concepts.

Over the years there have been several changes and shifts in his activities. At the beginning of his career he worked in a different way referencing science and philosophy. He used medical handbooks and old scientific illustrations (*Fractures* 1992–3), then he built works with books preserved in formaldehyde (*Destiny of Modern Art* 1993) and produced consumer packaging labels with the names of famous philosophers (*Taste of Thinking* 1995). There followed a series of interior simulations in which Ondák defined the neutral environment through the reduction of its physical attributes using mainly pieces of furniture: beds and wardrobe frames, plastic containers with chemicals, sockets pulled out of the wall or a dysfunctional door (*Anonymous Room* 1996). In these broken micro-situations Ondák raises a question of obstructed communication, the estrangement of intimate space and disorders in the nervous system of society.

Later in his installations Ondák focused on museum and gallery spaces working with their physical conditions and disposition. He reinstalls these spaces in his own way creating his own deconstructed models and tackling such issues as the dysfunctional running of these traditional institutions. (*Exposition*, Ujazdowsky Castle, Warsaw 1998; *Museum/Store*, the National Gallery, Prague 1999, Museum of

Contemporary Art; *Utopia Station*, 50th Venice Biennale 2003). Recently he has started to deal with issues of individual memory, creativity and the interpretation of images. He has involved local amateurs in a public art project *Public District (Ustí nad Labem 1999)*. He asked his acquaintances and friends to draw and/or make models based on his stories about different cities and places (*Untitled (Two Days in Stockholm) 1999, Common Journey 2000*). These conceptual starting-points have expanded into a platform for systematic and sensitive research into unexpected juxtapositions and controversies.

Ondák brings his own range of ideas and intellectual approaches to trying to tackle communication problems in society in many different ways: he either presents a series of postcards depicting people who don't travel in the present day global world (*Antinomads 2000*), or stages situations that work as performances at exhibition openings or during exhibitions (*Guided Tour 2002, Ticket, Please 2002, Good Feelings in Good Times 2003–4*), or reconstructs three-dimensional models of the surface of Mars in the gallery space (*Spirit and Opportunity*, Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne 2004). He has developed a type of nonlinear thinking, a deeper level of reflecting reality and of coding condensed information. Thus Ondák continues to create and manage turbulent environments using basic materials and broken spaces and situations.

Denisa Lehocká

(b. 1971 Trenčín. Lives and works in Bratislava.)

fig. 187

Denisa Lehocká, another important representative of the 1990s generation of artists, has developed her practice in relation to post- and neo-conceptual positions. She works in various media — diary-like drawings, objects and installations — concentrating not on a specific issue but on the intellectual process. From this position her fragile meditative environments work as models combining different layers of perception. She prefers individual experience and the introspective visual interpretation of ideas. Lehocká constructs fragile, poetic and quiet scenes applying characteristic feminine and soft materials (nail polish, pink terrycloth, threads, perforated soaps, artificial eyelashes, hair, rice, artificial pearls, adhesive tapes, plaster, eraser, plastic foam, etc.). Using these materials and objects she creates a peculiar register of everyday

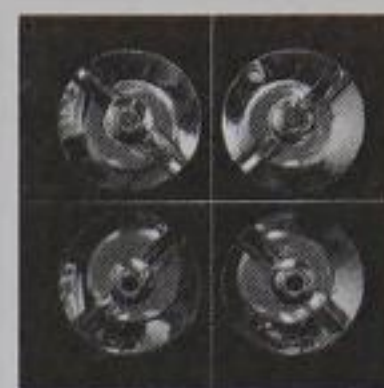
situations. She accumulates objects and drawings in information nodes, arranging them in small groups on tables, chairs, hanging them on the wall, or directly placing them on the floor according to a confidential clue. These static pieces of information are usually arranged in a series, connected through an integrated circuit to form a unique network of almost imperceptible signs, fragile connections and unexpected encounters. Thus the spectator is made to read the sensitive micro-world of the artist in parts and to engage in an intense private conversation with her. Lehocká creates almost empty environments with silent spiritual discharge, where details, points and pauses complete the interpretation of the feminine way of dealing with different objects and ideas. In these spaces, that resemble residential rooms, she makes special arrangements of her delicate drawings, which are an inseparable part of her visual thinking. Her drawings that are often the initial sketches of a new environment translated into lines, black circles, balls and figures, with their succinct narration (intensified by computer inputs and filtrations), make a picture diary, a notebook of ephemeral situations and sequences of experiences and the memory. She renews and enriches her vocabulary with each new realisation, and at the same time she manages to respect the given characteristics of the space and to sensitively reflect this in her work (site specific installation in the Synagogue, Šamorín 1995, *Distant Similarities*, National Gallery, Prague 1999, *Manifesta 3*, Moderna galerija, Ljubljana 2000; *Raumkörper*, Kunsthalle Basel 2000).

Lehocká creates rather open visual fields, which despite possessing the fragmentary character of dispersed structures and details, do not lose their necessary resonance nor their integrity as a whole. When outlining her work on the border between inner nature and culture, she expressively contributes to the intensive visual communication.

1 We can define three types of culture, or three basic models of apprehension towards culture in twentieth-century Slovak art. I. Iconic (rural) culture that is traceable throughout the whole century, builds on tradition, heritage, iconic thinking, traditional media, repetition of national and local codes. II. Urban (industrial) culture that developed in the 1960s and has preferred permanent innovation, the dictates of novelty, an orientation towards the future, analytical thinking, subversion, experimentation, international codes. III. (Mass) Media culture that developed in the 1990s and expanded with

globalisation, digital structures, system of techno-images, celebrities, mass taste and production, etc. See: V. Beskid, 'Three Questions Without A Single Interrogation Mark', in *90's plus – Reflection of the Visual Art at the Turn of the 20th and 21st Century*, international symposium, AICA – Union of Theorists of Contemporary Fine Art, Bratislava 2003, pp.6-15

- 2 M. Kundera, *Immortality*, Atlantis Brno 1993, p.117
- 3 W. Gibson, *Neuromancer*, Ace Books, New York 1984
- 4 C. Schöpf, G. Stocker, *InfoWar* (exh. cat.), Springer, Vienna and New York 1998
- 5 B. Latour, P. Weibel (eds.), *Iconoclash – Beyond the Image Wars in Science, Religion, and Art* (exh. cat), ZKM Karlsruhe/MIT Press, Cambridge 2002
- 6 His wife, the artist Tamara Klimová was a member of the group Club of Concretists (Klub konkretistov), active from 1967-71. This group of Czechoslovak artists concentrated on the geometrical and constructivist tendency. Influenced by the terminology of Theo van Doesburg and Max Bill, the group's approach was based on their positive vision and belief in the progress of modern civilisation, science and technology. Slovak members of the group were Eduard Antal, Juraj Bartusz, Mária Bartuszová, Euba Belohradská, Štefan Belohradský, Anton Cepka, Jarmila Čuhánková, Tamara Klimová, Anastázia Miertušová and Pavol Maňka. In the early 1990s the group resumed their activities.
- 7 Manifesto first printed in 1988, in J. Ruttkay (ed.), *Milan Dobeš*, Interpond, Bratislava 1994
- 8 *Ibid.*
- 9 *Mária Bartuszová* (exh. cat.), Gallery of M.A. Bazovský, Trenčín 1983
- 10 His most significant monuments are *Victims are Warning*, Banská Bystrica 1969 (later removed to Kalište), *The Slovak National Uprising Memorial*, Kovačová 1968-9, *The Place Up There*, Seoul 1987 and *In the Fathers' Footsteps*, La Défense, Paris 1987-92
- 11 From the manifesto, *Stano Filko: Stano Filko II*, 1965-9, *Tvorba/Works-Creation*, Bratislava 1971
- 12 From the manifesto, *White Space in White Space* (exh. cat.), House of Art, Brno 1974
- 13 EGOQ – personal quotient as synthesis of intellectual, emotional and spiritual levels.
- 14 More in *Julius Koller: Univerzálne Futurologické Operácie*, Kölnischer Kunstverein, Verlag Walther König, Cologne 2003
- 15 Rónai appropriates like a parasite numerous artworks and everyday situations. He creates works opposing the logic and operation of the applied digital media and their language (static images in video transcriptions, etc.) and holds on to the position: *Sorry, I'm not an artist* (*A-no-nym saloon, mini.mail art*, 1984)
- 16 See the previous section on Julius Koller.



From left to right and top to bottom:

- Alojz Klimo *Crossroad D* 1969
- Milan Dobeš *Luminous-Optical Object* 1974
- Mária Bartuszová *Untitled* 1986
- Jozef Jankovič *Spider Web* 1969
- Stano Filko *Cathedral of Humanism* 1967-8
- Julius Koller *Question Mark* 1969
- Peter Rónai *Message Saloon* 1992
- Ivan Csudai *Dying Sun* 1996
- Roman Ondák *Anonymous Room* 1996
- Denisa Lehocká *Untitled* 1997

Recall

Igor Zabel

Stane Kregar (fig. 12) was active from the 1930s to the 1970s. He was an able painter, known for frequently changing his styles and approaches the medium. During his development he moved from surrealism through figurative art, with elements varying from the Paris School to the New Objectivity. Later he explored a geometric figurative art reminiscent of cubism, abstract painting, elements of Art Informel and eventually the new figurative painting of the 1960s. In spite of this stylistic eclecticism he was able to maintain a recognisable personal handwriting in his works. This was important because it introduced a number of pictorial styles and approaches to the Slovene art context. I am mentioning him here because of the exceptional role his work had in the early 1950s. His paintings, based on the study of contemporary French abstract painting and exhibited in 1953 together with the works of Riko Debenjak, marked the beginning of a new chapter of art in Slovenia after 1945. They introduced a new, modernist and abstract visual language and indicated the importance of modernism, which was soon to become the leading approach in the Slovene (as well as Yugoslav) art and cultural scene.

Zoran Mušič (fig. 55), **Marij Pregelj** (fig. 34) and **Gabrijel Stupica** (fig. 24) belong to more or less the same generation, and their development had a similar structure: they began in the 1930s with works belonging to figurative art in the style of the Paris School. Later the three artists developed a distinctive modernist visual language that remained basically figurative, with a personal world of subjects and motifs. Each of them developed a peculiar, easily recognisable visual style. In their art it is sometimes possible to trace elements influenced by modernist artists such as Picasso, Bacon, Moore, Dubuffet and others, which indicates a range of contemporary influences. An essential aspect, however,

of their work remained the fact that they were able to incorporate such elements and influences into their individual artistic worlds. These painters represent the model of the artist who has developed his own artistic idiom, i.e. an original combination of artistic skills and strengths and a personal, sometimes obsessive, world created through their works. Each of the painters is generally accepted as an essential figure and point of reference in the Slovene art context of the twentieth century. It was also important for the development of art and culture in Slovenia in the second half of the century that the three entered the international art system and could function as a link between the local and international art worlds.

Janez Bernik (fig. 27) represents a generation that started to work in the context of an already developed modernist language. Bernik and his colleagues were thus able to rethink developments in contemporary European art and include these elements in their own work. Bernik's first important achievements were connected with the visual language and philosophy of Art Informel. In later works he used elements of other styles and trends, from the use of letters and writing to elements of pop art and the new figurative painting of the 1960s, principles of post-painterly abstraction and the analytical abstract painting of the 1970s, and neo-expressionist figurative art in the 1980s. Bernik has arguably been the most important representative of the modernist tradition in Slovenia since the 1960s. His importance to the Slovene art context is connected to his impressive skills and to the fact that he adapted the elements of different artistic styles to his own approach rather than vice versa. Bernik also played an important role in opening the Slovene art community to the international scene and was one of the first Slovene artists recognised in the international (especially European) context of the time.

The particular importance of the **OHO** group (fig. 45, fig. 53), which was active in Slovenia in the second half of the 1960s and early 1970s, lies not only in the fact that it introduced locally issues and ways of working that had been developed in the international avant-garde art of that time, but even more in the fact that — always taking into account its particular position and context — it developed original responses to these issues and approaches. The development of the group can be divided into three rather different phases. The first was centered on the notion of reism (from the Latin word 'res', i.e. 'thing'). They wanted to reach a situation, where there would be no essential difference between people and things. OHO used a range of media (and their in-between forms), such as drawings, photographs, film, video (the first video works in Slovenia were produced in this context in the late 1960s), music, texts, but also ways of dressing, living and behaving. In their second phase the group established a dialogue with the contemporary artistic avant-garde: they used (and adapted) principles of Arte Povera, process art, land art, body art and conceptual art. The third phase of OHO's work represented a combination of conceptual art and a kind of esoteric and ecological approach to making art. The subject of the work was a harmonic unity between the members of the group, but also between the group and nature, even the universe as a whole. In their search for such harmony they employed different means, including telepathy. The group was just developing an international career when its members decided they should abandon art as a separate sphere and really engage with life. They therefore settled in an abandoned farm and started a community.

Tugo Šušnik (fig. 121) played an important role in the process of re-formulating and re-evaluating the modernist abstract tradition in the 1970s. He and other artists of his generation returned to the tradition of abstract art — especially in America — and of modernist criticism, developing this into the base and horizon of the Slovene art context for the next ten or fifteen years. Even as these artists abandoned abstract language in favour of the figurative art of the New Image movement, modernist issues remained a hidden determinant in their work. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Šušnik himself transformed his art and introduced a complex, multi-layered figurative painting, which still followed modernist demands, however, regarding the nature of the pictorial field.

Thus, he created a pictorial paradigm essential for art in Slovenia in the 1980s.

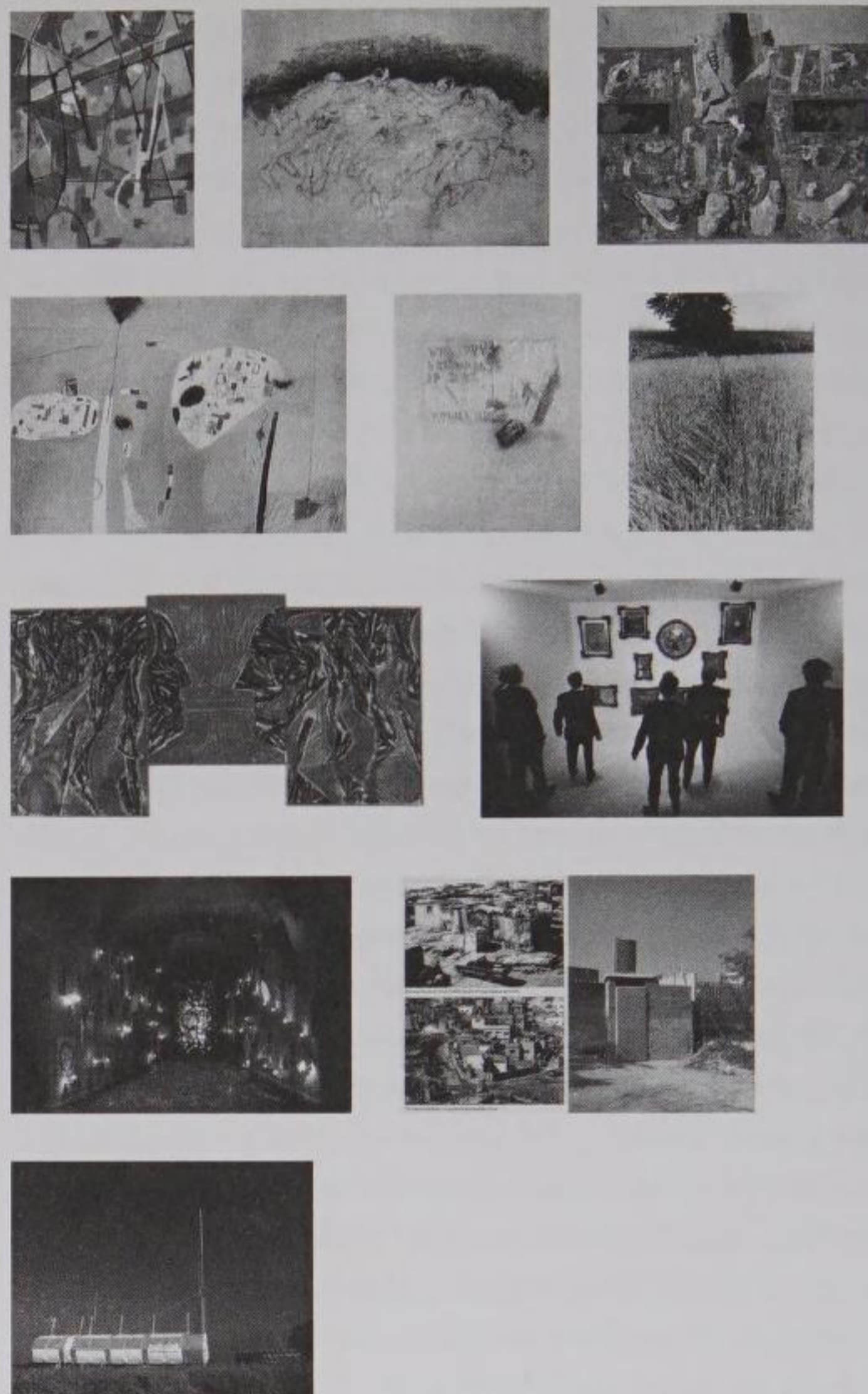
The **IRWIN** group (fig. 159, fig. 177), began working in the context of the lively multimedia activities of the so-called alternative scene of the 1980s and — together with the broader collective *Neue Slowenische Kunst* (NSK) — developed into a central and highly influential phenomenon within the Slovene art scene in the past few decades. The group has developed an intriguing, complex and highly original approach, although parallel in its intentions to the endeavours of contemporary (post-)conceptual and critical artists, in both the East and West. There are three main principles in the work of the group. The first is the idea of building one's own artistic position out of one's particular circumstances; by being particular, art can become truly universal. The second is working in a group, a collective, or even an organisation, shifting the emphasis away from the individual personality of the artist. The third is the fundamental NSK working procedure, sometimes called the retro-principle. An image is never neutral or innocent and it never appears in a neutral, empty space. Also, the actual function of an image is essentially dependent on the real context in which it operates (pure forms can have direct political meanings, propaganda works can be purified into merely aesthetic objects). From this material, complex works of art are made, the effect of which is often traumatic or provocative. The group's interest in the determining role of the (social and political) context led the artists towards more and more research into the way their paintings were installed, and finally to the establishment of the NSK State; a state in time, without territory, but with the necessary insignia and elements of a state. This gives their work the background of a state's interests. Another important aspect in organising and controlling their own environment is a process of self-historisation. Group members have developed an art critical and art historical terminology to describe their own work and to place it into the system of critical and historical discourse. By codifying the context, concepts and traditions of their own work, they can determine its meanings and the way it is understood.

The work of the **VSSD** group (fig. 139) represented one of the most original and complex achievements within the Slovene art community in the 1980s and 1990s. The group produced spectacular so-called space paintings. These were total works of art surfeited

with interwoven images that endlessly appeared and disappeared again, constantly transforming and mirroring each other. The observer's view became decentralised and deconcentrated, as the visual world seemed to be an endless anamorphosis, which has lost the original, 'proper' image. The group compared their work with natural processes, but they also reflected upon the actual social and political circumstances of the time, albeit in an indirect, sometimes enigmatic way. An important part of the group's work were dense texts combining theory, poetry and different allusions, which were thus somehow similar to the space-paintings themselves.

Since the mid 1980s **Marjetica Potrč** (fig. 216) has been a central figure in Slovene art circles. She began as a sculptor, producing complex works that involved the observer in an intense interactive relationship, questioning established ideas about the self, object, body, space and time. Gradually, however, Potrč has become increasingly interested in the issues of contemporary cities and urban planning, especially the contradictions between rational city development and amorphous and uncontrolled urban structures, such as slums, shantytowns, etc. Her works are based on many pieces of information: texts, experiences, fragments, images and analyses. In spite of the fact that her works sometimes seem to be anthropological studies of a sort, she uses these materials to construct a personal, poetic meditation on the contemporary world.

Marko Peljhan (fig. 198) has developed a particular strategy combining artistic issues with explicit social criticism from the position of an activist. He is interested in the social use and functions of the new technologies, especially concerning issues of communication, observation, telematics, and control. He discloses the social role and function of such technologies in his projects, and proposes alternative uses for them. Indeed, one could say that he uses art for political purposes. He tries to inform us about the strategies of political, economic and military power and of the way this power exploits technologies. But he also tries to stimulate us to an effective resistance to this power. On the other hand his works remain poetic, complex structures, a continuation of the tradition of the poetic and utopian avant-garde works of the twentieth century.



From left to right and top to bottom:

- Stane Kregar *The Spring Wind* 1954
- Zoran Mušič *We are not the last ones* 1971
- Marij Pregelj *Unknown Hero* 1966
- Gabrijel Stupica *Studio* 1962
- Janez Bernik *White Notation* 1964
- OHO: Milenko Matanović *Wheat and Rope* 1969
- Tugo Šušnik *Tryptich* 1980
- IRWIN *IRWIN Live* 1996
- vssd group (Painter Do You Know Your Duty) *Space of a Painting* 1987
- Marjetica Potrč *East Wahdat: Upgrading Programme* 1999
- Marko Peljhan *Makrolab* 1997–2007

Total Recall – Total Closure

Marina Gržinić

The artists, groups and movements discussed here form a productive matrix for what may be considered a critical and political re-questioning of the Slovene cultural and artistic space.

The selected artists, groups or works are listed chronologically, according to the year or decade in which they first appeared in the Slovene cultural context. This order should in no way be perceived as a hierarchical ranking. This contribution to the *East Art Map* project deals also with power structures in art and culture in Slovenia that nullified, ignored or absorbed some of the important movements and productions in the Slovene context.

OHO (1966–71)

Members: Marjan Ciglič, Drago Dellabernardina, Srečo Dragan, Iztok Geister (IG Plamen), Matjaž Hanžek, Aleš Kermavner, Vojin Kovač-Chubby, Naško Križnar, Milenko Matanović, David Nez, Marko Pogačnik, Andraž Šalamun, Tomaž Šalamun, Franci Zagoričnik.

fig. 45, fig. 53

OHO was the only conceptual art (or Arte Povera) group to appear in Slovenia in the 1960s, nevertheless its impact was extremely significant. Obsessive and persistent, its work extends from the middle of the decade to the beginning of the 1970s. A symptomatic reading of the group's history reveals the following route: the artists in the group won international acclaim but had to 'seek refuge' in Belgrade in order to avoid being hospitalised in an asylum — that is to say, Belgrade, which at the time had already had some experience with radical body art, gave the group the shelter and support it needed for its work. In 1978, the Gallery of the Student Culture and Arts Centre (Galerija Škuc) published a comprehensive catalogue

about the group, which was edited by the Slovene art historian Tomaž Brejc. In 1994, an OHO retrospective, curated by Igor Zabel, was presented at the Moderna Galerija (Museum of Modern Art) in Ljubljana.

In 2000, the same institution organised a huge exhibition, with an equally substantial catalogue, under the title *Arteast Collection 2000+*, presented alongside *Manifesta 3*, which was taking place in Ljubljana that year. In this collection/exhibition, acclaimed as the first comprehensive presentation of Eastern European art, not a single Slovene artist was included, not even OHO. This despite the fact that the group is considered to be the most significant, if not the only, manifestation of conceptual art in Slovenia in the 1960s and 1970s. This is even more problematic since the museum itself stated that the conceptual movement in the East was the core of its *Arteast Collection 2000+*. What is more, this show was produced not merely for Slovene viewers but was intended specifically for the international audience attending *Manifesta 3*. *Arteast Collection 2000+*, then, completely disavowed the Slovene contribution, essentially erasing art production in Slovenia from the 1960s onwards.

As an example of the concepts OHO introduced into Slovene art and culture, I should mention the group's living-sculpture project *Triglav*, realised in 1968. As stated in the retrospective catalogue published by ŠKUC (Ljubljana 1978), this project bore an unmistakably ironic political message: Triglav is the name of the highest mountain in Slovenia and a symbol of Slovene identity (characterised by a devotion to Alpine culture and nature); the name translates into English as 'triple-head'. In OHO's *Triglav* (as seen today in a photograph documenting the project), we see the heads of three members of the group 'resurfacing' through a black cloth in a pose

that resembles the three peaks of Mount Triglav. OHO's projects, then, did not originate in a search for some ironic tradition or as a kind of Sots-Art inversion of everyday imagery but derived instead from more elementary and essentially different questions: the group's work represented an investigation of the function of art, the meaning of the artist in the world, the identity of art, and its conditions and boundaries. It might be useful to contrast the conceptual tradition of OHO with the Sots-Art movement in the Soviet Union in the same period. Whereas Sots-Art can be understood as a kind of mimicry of the communist existence *per se*, the whole of OHO's activity needs to be read from a different perspective, namely, within the context of the so-called concrete utopia that is possible to be defined as being neither an illusion nor wishful thinking, but rather offers us a perspective and an orientation, as well as ideas about how to approach the future. We may draw nearer to utopia in reality, but we are also aware that we will never reach it.

The Ljubljana Alternative Movement, The Ljubljana Lacan School, and Slavoj Žižek

(circa 1980s)

fig. 199

The underground movement that emerged in Ljubljana in the 1980s bears witness to an exceptional convergence of art, culture, and politics. The movement first arose within the context of the Student Culture and Arts Centre (ŠKUC) in Ljubljana and was closely connected with Radio Študent (established in 1968 after the student riots in Ljubljana) and *Mladina*, a critical weekly newspaper targeting the younger generation. It is important to emphasise that the alternative, or sub-culture movement was something more than a marginal movement; ultimately and in accordance with the logic of political isometrics, it functioned as a reconfirmation of 'the centre as centre'. The most significant strategy of the alternative movement in Ljubljana focused not on the search for alternatives to the communist system, but rather on finding alternatives within it. In this way, it clearly represented a profound change from the usual activities of underground movements in Europe, especially in Eastern Europe.

The end of the 1970s in Slovenia, commonly seen as marking the end of authoritarian politics, was a watershed for what had previously been an empty space in art. This was followed by the growth of a new

youth sub-culture, 'punk', which provided an uncompromising critical energy that assessed and nourished the creativity of the 1980s. Unlike parallel scenes in Western Europe and North America (such as are discussed, for instance, in Dick Hebdige's classic study), Slovenia's alternative sub-culture was about more than just style or fashion. Fashion's practice of never-ending surplus production was, after all, unknown under socialism. Instead, the Ljubljana sub-culture signified a reconfiguration of the social and artistic arenas. The Slovene Alternative Movement of the 1980s introduced some very specific autonomous productions and organisational forms into culture and art. These were developed independently of, and parallel to, existing official and largely impotent cultural systems and channels. Hence, each alternative activity represented an intrusion into official cultural and artistic production, as well as a shift to the social and political sphere. The alternative culture afforded new status to certain artistic practices (for example, performance, video, and popular theatre) and introduced a range of new socialisation processes. These included new forms of social activity and new institutions, which decisively defined the Slovene cultural scene. A network of clubs and public meeting places developed, along with a new acceptance of 'deviant' social and artistic activities. The coming-out of Ljubljana's male homosexual community and the formation of a visible gay culture also occurred around this time. Ljubljana was, in fact, home to the first organised gay movement in socialist Eastern Europe, including the founding of the gay social and artistic club Magnus in 1984 and the creation of a lesbian subgroup within the women's organisation Lilit in 1984–5. Both groups were part of ŠKUC, along with other new social movements, such as the ŠKUC-Forum Section for a Culture of Peace, founded in 1985. Such activities confirmed Ljubljana as an urban topos and helped pave the way for the further development of the Eastern European gay culture in the 1990s.

Along with the gay cultural organisations, ŠKUC's ideological framework also supported the organisation of a section focused on women's issues, namely, Lilit, which enabled feminism to slowly trickle into Slovene society. Unlike Belgrade and Zagreb, where committed feminists (Žarana Papić, Rada Iveković, Dunja Blažević, and others) had been actively developing both the theory and practice of the movement since the 1970s, Ljubljana had to wait until the 1980s and the emergence of the sub-culture scene

for this important practice to take shape. It is worth noting that in Belgrade and Zagreb the feminist experience and theoretical orientation laid the foundation for avant-garde production in the 1970s, just as Lacanian psychoanalytical discourse re-articulated the theoretical framework of the Slovene underground in the 1980s. In this way, the Ljubljana Lacan school, today known primarily through the work of the renowned cultural theoretician Slavoj Žižek, played a crucial role in the formation of the theoretical context and fields of interpretation for Ljubljana's alternative scene. It is also important to mention that the underground had a reciprocal influence on this theory and that Ljubljana's sub-culture movements also provided a productive terrain for the activities of the NSK movement.

A symptomatic reading of the history and development of the alternative scene reveals that the potential it showed in the 1980s was erased in the next decades by surveys of Slovene contemporary arts in which the sub-culture movement was not only cannibalised under the word 'we' — implying that this was a general Slovene phenomenon — but it was also presented as a continual process in line with the formalistic tradition of Slovene art and culture. Books and texts dealing with the modern tradition of Slovene art ignored the alternative scene altogether. The reason for this is that the sub-culture movement represents a complete break with all previous cultural production in Slovenia. It served as a kind of condensation of time and space that, over a period of ten years, introduced an absolutely new concept of art, one that viewed artistic strategies as inherently political paradigms. In addition, the alternative scene connected art with major radical postmodern activities, from mass-media culture to technology-based image productions.

Laibach

(circa 1980s)

fig. 128

Laibach, the band that first appeared in the context of the Slovene/Yugoslav punk movement, was immediately linked with fascism because of the kind of artistic activity it engaged in from the beginning. The group's first lead singer, Tomaž Hostnik (b. 1961 — d. 1982), performed with cut lips and blood on his face and insisted on adopting the costume (a pseudo-military uniform) and posture of Mussolini. In contrast to standard musical performances, where

chaos is transformed into money, and audience satisfaction into the phrase, 'We'll come again', the severity and thoroughness of Laibach's live performances extended as far as the destruction of an intricately constructed set, which included flags, horns, a light show, and background film projections. Suspense was achieved not by the parallel montage of these elements, but by establishing affinities — between the film projections, the architecture, the stage design, and the performance itself. The aim was to destroy the very concept of a rock performance.

The essential element in every Laibach concert was the form of its performance, repeated from one song to another so that it became almost obsessive. Audience expectations, as far as 'content' was concerned, were not fulfilled. In lieu of critical distance, mockery, etc., Laibach performed, one might say, a (hyper-)literal re-enactment of totalitarian ritual. The audience was confronted with an almost fanatical identification with totalitarian ritual as performed by the group on the stage. The ideological totalitarian structure was undermined not by parodic imitation or a subversion pastiche of totalitarian codes, but by over-identification with them. As Žižek observed, the new art strategy Laibach introduced into the Eastern European context was the subversion of the totalitarian ritual in the very form of how it was performed. Laibach insisted on the literal repetition of the totalitarian ritual in all its obscene ambiguity, and with all its unwitting moments of obscenity — obscenities that a (totalitarian) power structure must constantly conceal if it is to perpetuate itself. With such an act of over-identification, and not with using a classical, direct critique of the socialist totalitarian system, Laibach performed an act of traversing the fundamental fantasy of the totalitarian ritual. It is important to make here as well a precise distinction between an authentic act of traversing the fundamental fantasy and an inauthentic one, which obfuscates even more the invisible traces of the void around which all the things gravitate. Almost twenty-five years later, in 2005, it is extremely important to clarify this, since 'repetition' is today the principal strategy of a variety of groups and projects originating in the former socialist East. But, as Žižek insists (with reference to Alain Badiou), a palpable political consequence of this notion of the authentic act is that in each concrete constellation there is one delicate nodal point of contention that determines where one truly stands. Pursuing this argument, I can state that

in Laibach this was not, as it was wrongly understood some kind of a neo-Nazi or a skinhead movement, but on the contrary, it was undoubtedly the deep-rooted relationship of their music to the industrial punk music movement of the 1980s, the most radical avant-garde rock-and-roll exploration of the time. Here lies the point of contention for Laibach's absolute radicality, rather than any relationship of Laibach with a populist music movement. Had it been otherwise, there would have been a total obfuscation of the traces of the void around which the socialist totalitarian system rotated.

Neue Slowenische Kunst (NSK)

(est. 1984)

fig. 134

Neue Slowenische Kunst (the German name, meaning 'New Slovenian Art,' is normally used, or just the initials NSK) is an art movement, or rather, an organisation established in Ljubljana in 1984. It comprises the rock band Laibach, the visual arts group IRWIN, the 'retro-garde' theatre company Sestre Scipion Nasice (later renamed the Red Pilot Cosmokinetic Theatre and then, in the 1990s, the Noordung Cosmokinetic Theatre), the design group New Collectivism, and the Department of Practical Philosophy.

NSK proclaims itself to be an abstract social body situated in an intense socio-political space that is simultaneously a phenomenon of both West and East. In its structure and organisation it resembles one of capitalism's demonic machines, namely, the corporate system — something that, ironically, does not exist in the Western art world, since in the West such an organisation is possible only if linked to actual financial capital. Thanks to its socialist heritage, NSK was able to develop on purely ideological foundations. Laibach (and later, other NSK entities) made use of all the classic methods of the avant-garde — manifestos, collective performances, public provocations and political interventions. NSK projects unveiled a new cultural context and contributed to the rapid disintegration of the aesthetics and ethics of communist and post-communist culture and identity. A characteristic feature of NSK has been its willingness to radically question representational models as well as the presentation and circulation of artistic works in Slovenia and, more generally, in Eastern Europe.

NSK has, then, been able to intervene in the historical 'continuity' of Slovene and Eastern European artistic output.

The NSK design group New Collectivism was the object of ferocious attack and censorship in 1987 for its design of a poster for the *Day of Youth*, a holiday that commemorated the birthday of the late President Tito. The poster, which had been accepted by a jury of the Yugoslav Youth Organisation, a branch of the Yugoslav Communist Party, initially won public acclaim for its graphics and 'politically' appropriate design. Later, however, a letter published in the Serbian daily *Politika* drew attention to the fact that the poster was a 'remake' of a 1936 Nazi painting entitled *The Third Reich*, by Richard Klein. New Collectivism had replaced the Nazi symbols with socialist ones (for instance, a star was now where a swastika had been in the original poster). Even more cynical, however, than the poster's inversion of symbols was that — as was pointed out in numerous analyses of the situation — the jury had identified completely with the visual ideology in the New Collectivism poster and chosen it as the most appropriate representation for the Day of Youth celebration. After it was revealed that the designers had 'refracted' communist imagery from Nazi symbolism (the latter being, so to speak, the obscene hidden supplement of the former), the Communist Party power machine tried, although without success, to have the group put in jail. The mechanism of the power structure is operative as long as it remains concealed. At the moment when New Collectivism made visible the hidden structure of the libidinal foundations of communist power, their target reacted with fury.

We may define these procedures within NSK as a special process of montage, on the basis of which iconographic and symbolic elements from the history of Slovene and world art are again constructed and deconstructed (this process was later referred to as the 'retroprinciple'). Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, in his essay 'Allegorical Procedures: Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art', comments: 'Grosz and Heartfield, as early as 1916, when they invented the strategy of montage, became aware of the artistic and cultural power of allegorical appropriations, comparisons and fragmentations.' The result is a concept of artistic design that neither places itself in the role of judge nor strives for a simplified presentation. The new strategy of artistic production and presentation introduced by

NSK, and especially the band Laibach, may be characterised as a process of denaturalising already 'natural' cultural values and rituals.

In regard to this strategic concept, we should not overlook the NSK projects that took place in private residences and apartments: the Sestre Scipion Nasice theatre performance *The Retro-Garde Hinkemann Happening*, and the IRWIN exhibition *Was ist Kunst?* (held in 1984 in a private apartment in Ljubljana). In such projects the public dimension of art was revealed as intrinsically connected to private influences, private power structures, and, last but not least, the hermetically and exclusively established unified history of art.

Kasimir Malevich (Belgrade) (1986) and Fiction Reconstructed (2000–1)

fig. 129

In the 1980s, several projects took place in Ljubljana that were based on the idea of reconstructing works of art from the tradition of the historical avant-garde — projects such as *The Last Futurist Exhibition by Kasimir Malevich (Belgrade)*, *The International Exhibition of Modern Art (Armory Show)*, and the lecture entitled 'Walter Benjamin: Mondrian 1963–1996', all of which took place at Galerija Škuc in Ljubljana.

The Last Futurist Exhibition by Kasimir Malevich (Belgrade) was first presented in a private apartment in Belgrade from December 1985 to February 1986, after which it moved to Galerija Škuc. Here we have the opposite of the experiences of OHO. OHO was able to survive because the group found refuge in Belgrade; the Belgrade Malevich received public acclaim only at Galerija Škuc in Ljubljana. It was only within the context of the alternative movement of Ljubljana, rooted in rock-and-roll and new media technologies, that this project — which involved the ontological dimension of the copy as a visual machine that 'thinks politically' — was able to have its public premiere. The Belgrade Malevich, then, may be legitimately seen as a Slovene phenomenon that was born (aborted) in Belgrade, but only fully conceptualised in Ljubljana. It is important to state that these drawn parallels had nothing to do with competition 'among cities' or socialist national contexts, on the contrary these relations show clearly that radical art projects of contemporary art never relate to national contexts, but can function only and solely with a reference to similar radical art movements. OHO was contextualised

within the 1970s Serbian body and conceptual art (Marina Abramović, Neša Paripović, etc.), and the Belgrade Malevich within the Ljubljana underground movement and punk rock of the 1980s, proving that these projects never referred to any national (socialist) context, but on the contrary, to those radical art projects that were capable to think about art as a political project of emancipation and revolution.

The 2001 *Fiction Reconstructed* exhibition (curated by Marina Gržinić and the anonymous artist) presented artefacts from three previous contemporary art shows: *The Last Futurist Exhibition by Kasimir Malevich (Belgrade)*; *The International Exhibition of Modern Art (Armory Show)*, presented in Ljubljana in 1986; and the *Salon de Fleurus* in New York. *Fiction Reconstructed* was held at Galerija Škuc, and so presented the same Malevich, etc., fifteen years later.

The only 'new' part of *Fiction Reconstructed* was that devoted to the *Salon de Fleurus*, which had opened to the public eight years earlier in a small backyard apartment at 41 Spring Street in New York. The subject of this long-term project, whose authors remain anonymous, was the collection of modern art assembled by Leo and Gertrude Stein in Paris, in their apartment at rue de Fleurus, in the early twentieth century. For *Fiction Reconstructed*, artefacts from *Salon de Fleurus* were shipped to Ljubljana; this was the first presentation of work from the *Salon* outside its 'native' New York. The *Salon de Fleurus* elaborates on the so-called tactical position of the artist who conceals his identity, the strategies of postmodern art, and the post-socialist condition of art. At the very moment when postmodernism proclaims the 'death of the author' and the rise of anti-auratic art in the public realm, the art market becomes ever more conscious of the monopolising power of the artist's signature, as well as the related issues of authenticity and forgery. Within the metaphors and fictions of postmodern discourse much is at stake as electronic technology seems to emerge unbidden and pose a set of crucial ontological questions regarding the status and power of the human being. It has fallen to science fiction to repeatedly propose a new subject that can somehow directly interface with — and master — the cybernetic technologies of the Information Age. We could, perhaps, suggest that the *Salon de Fleurus* project might be re-read or revealed as a demon, something that disturbs the linearity of history, art, and science. Well-known examples of this include

Maxwell's demon, Gödel's trickster and Haraway's coyote. Science and literature generate icons, agents, and monsters that help us interface with the world. In *Salon de Fleurus*, the philosophical questions of plausibility and implausibility override questions about what is true and what is false. In *Salon de Fleurus*, the real-time image is more important than that which is represented. Subsequently, real time prevails over real space, virtuality dominates actuality, turning the very concept of reality on its head.

Metelkova (1991–2001)

fig. 153

Metelkova is the name of a street in Ljubljana where the Yugoslav Army had its barracks until it was expelled after the Ten-Day War in June 1991, when Slovenia won its independence. The new underground generation of hardcore punk activists, independent artists and others, asked the city council of Ljubljana to give the abandoned military complex to the city's independent art and cultural organisations. Although the city council promised to do so, it secretly planned to destroy the complex in order to build a commercial centre there instead. The cultural activists, intellectuals and artists responded by squatting on the site, which still bears signs of the battle between the independent cultural scene and Ljubljana officials.

At first, the Metelkova squat was run by a large group of artists and activists known as the Network for Metelkova. This group answered a unique demand for the restructuring of Ljubljana's social life and cultural scene at the beginning of the 1990s. The Network for Metelkova represented a cultural programme, a mobilisation of artists, and above all, a vehicle for demanding future changes in both the architectural/urban plan and the social and cultural life of Ljubljana. The Ljubljana city council cut water and electricity supplies to the Metelkova squat in 1993 in an attempt to shut down the cultural events and programmes, and to force the activists, intellectuals and artists to leave. Today the site bears the name Metelkova City as a reminder of the battles with the city council and as a strong and rather ironic statement of the area's autonomy.

The creation of Metelkova City was not the action of an unknown 'crowd', but a re-articulation of space by a large group of artists and activists who were endeavouring to implement new systems of culture in Ljubljana, as well as to emphasise the possibility of

revitalizing and integrating existing sub-cultures and alternative systems and to create new functional (and dysfunctional) systems of cultural and social action. Metelkova City can be seen as a powerful example of the redistribution of meaning to the so-called voids in today's cities. Symbolically structured empty zones, such as the former Metelkova army barracks, are bearers of surplus meaning. These empty zones, or, as I call them, 'a-topical urban topoi', are not located (they are a-located) on official maps of the city; their existence is invisible, erased from such maps. The city administration is both ashamed and terrified of these new voids and their significance as new political formless forms in the city. They are also an indication that the functionality of cities and their formal spaces have radically changed.

With Metelkova, a trajectory was made towards social topicality — from the passive arrangement of buildings in the public environment or the simple renewal of the physical environment to processes of living and producing that can be called, to borrow a phrase from Mary Jane Jacob, 'culture in action'. Rather than simply representing a way of expanding the audience in the urban ethos, Metelkova replaces it; Metelkova's entire specific community is at once both creator and user, a city within a city.

Metelkova can serve as a useful paradigm in the context of Slovene cultural policy in general and also in an analysis of the methods, political decisions, and actions of the city administration with regard to relationships between the Metelkova project and the country's various artistic, cultural, political and social structures (institutions, associations and media). Among various studies on the topic, one of the most important is an examination of the parallels between the Metelkova project and the *Reports on Slovenian Cultural Policy*, which was undertaken by a team of European experts and written by Michael Wimmer.

This excellent report drew a very precise picture of the characteristics of the so-called cultural-policy situation in Slovenia. The first conclusion they reached was that Slovenia had no real cultural policy (that is, none with a clear programme). The second important aspect they identified was 'over-institutionalisation' in the field of culture. The report concluded that Slovenia's cultural and artistic life was largely dominated by national cultural institutions, which represent a hierarchically powerful element in the perception, distribution, relocation and practice of culture in Slovenia. The alternative culture was

demonised by national cultural institutions, which portrayed it as a real threat to the 'historical city' — but this was nothing more than a carnivalesque game in the 1990s. In fact the European report noted that the newly independent Slovenia of the 1990s had succeeded in completely paralysing the same alternative culture that had enjoyed such a fruitful existence in the 1980s.

IRWIN's *NSK Embassies* and the *Retro-Avant-Garde* (1992)

fig. 159

One of the most attention-grabbing projects of the NSK movement in the post-socialist 1990s was the *State in Time* project carried out primarily by IRWIN. The first important point to be made here is that the *NSK State in Time* implied the absence of any kind of physical territory, and the second, that it operated through the virtualisation and transfer of national elements in a wholly temporal form in which cause and effect were not spatial but linked through information.

Moreover, the public within this 'state' attained a completely new autonomy and, at the same time, a new form of segregation (for example, instead of a ticket, it was necessary to arrange for a passport and visa in order to enter the *NSK State* in Berlin in 1994 at the Berlin Volksbühne).

In 1992, the same year IRWIN founded the *NSK Moscow Embassy*, an enormous retrospective Sots-Art exhibition opened in the premises of the Lenin Museum in Moscow. The staging of the exhibition was both a paradigmatic and educational indication that most Sots-Art artists were inspired by Leninist iconography and Soviet agitprop. At the Lenin Museum, Russian conceptualism was placed in what was almost its natural environment; situated among paintings and materials that documented the triumphs of Lenin's life and work, as well as models of Lenin's rooms in the Kremlin and elsewhere. The Sots-Art exhibition came to life almost too unambiguously.

The *NSK Embassies* (and later, *Consulates*) may be perceived as specific social installations that symbolically and artistically simulate the transfer of the NSK phenomenon into different cultural, social and political contexts. IRWIN established the *NSK Embassy in Moscow* in a private apartment (Leninsky Prospekt 12, apartment n° 24) in May and June 1992. The façade of the apartment building was embellished with the artistically articulated insignia of a state embassy.

The *NSK Embassy in Moscow* was established in the context of the internationalisation of the important Eastern European phenomenon known as APT-ART (Apartment-Art) — the production and exhibition of art in the private apartments of Moscow's underground circles. The *Embassy* project did not attempt to achieve equilibrium in the opposition between totalitarian ideology and the untainted 'non-ideological' private sphere (although it did preserve something left over from the totalitarian style of claustrophobia), but rather it tried to actualise both spheres as two sides of the same coin (Žižek's formulation), both of which will disappear in a post-socialist democracy.

The *NSK Moscow Embassy* marked the beginning of IRWIN's investigation into the epistemological legacy of the encounter between Europe's East and West. In this intermediate period, when East was still East and was only beginning to adopt a bastardized Western form, the question of the inner spiritual art and cultural structure that survived in the East unrecognised for more than a century was of major importance. This involved a process of the East mirroring itself and its own position, where the recycling of its various histories would not be directed towards the West, but would reflect its own internal position and its own possibilities for creation. Instead of reading 'the East in the mirror of the West' (to paraphrase Homi Bhabha) — which had previously been the only valid option — the *NSK Moscow Embassy* now presented 'the East that reads the East'.

NSK Embassies were realised in Moscow (1992) and Ghent (1993), and at the Berlin Volksbühne (1993). *Consulates* were opened at the Hotel Ambasciatori in Florence (1993) and in the kitchen of private gallery-owner Marino Cettina in Umag, Croatia (1994). The IRWIN project *Office for Issuing Passports* in Amsterdam (1993) went even further by subverting the paradoxical quality of the photograph. When the IRWIN group used canvas as the background for its portrait photography, it emphasised the fact that portraits nowadays have meaning only as photographs in official documents. We could argue, cynically, that this meaning is even greater in the former socialist countries of Eastern Europe (as well as in Africa and Asia), where the possession of an official passport with a portrait photograph equals entrance into the developed Western world. If portrait photography has any meaning at all today, it is precisely in its most un-artistic manifestation, that is, in passports, where, as

Jo Anna Issak writes, a portrait functions as 'the institution of the subject within the visible', as a special procedure of inscription within a social body, which places us within the very foundations of society's functioning.

From a historical viewpoint, the *NSK Moscow Embassy* and the *NSK Umag Consulate* were essentially and directly linked to the functioning and presentation of NSK's projects in the mid-1980s, including the project *Was ist Kunst?*, held in a private apartment in Ljubljana in 1984.

In this extreme utopia, IRWIN's *NSK Embassy* means not only a break with analogy, but also a break with representational models on the basis of which we establish our certainty through similarity. We are dealing less with the circumstances of projection into space, and more with the space of difference, the space of the Other, and with the modality of interference: the translation, integration and determination of data from heterogeneous political, artistic, and social environments. *The Embassy* is neither self-presentation nor the mapping of a site where differences are manifested; it is a map of the effects of this difference and, therefore, a return to the interior of a claustrophobically 'virtual' space. This is also one possible way to understand the notion of the 'mapping' of post-socialism.

The mapping resulted in a new re-articulation of the retro-avant-garde movement from the 1980s. First, at the beginning of the 1990s, Peter Weibel relaunched the retro-avant-garde as a discursive matrix in an exhibition catalogue for the *Steierische Herbst* exhibition in Graz, Austria. In this he coded the ex-Yugoslav territory from 'outside', subsuming the productions of Mladen Stilinović (Zagreb), the Belgrade Malevich, and IRWIN under the common signifier the 'retro-avant-garde'. Then, in 1996, I recontextualised the 'retro-avant-garde' as the new '-ism' from the East. This was an attempt to map the territory once known as Yugoslavia through the projects of Mladen Stilinović, Kasimir Malevich (Belgrade) and the IRWIN group (especially IRWIN's *NSK Embassy* projects). In order to emphasise the synthetic dialectical moment within the retro-avant-garde, I asked how this spiritual element of corporeality (*NSK State in Time*) and this corporeal element of spirituality (*NSK Embassies* in concrete private spaces) could be labelled. I called them 'spectres', viewing the *NSK State in Time* as the spectre of the state and the *NSK Embassies* as the spectre of embassies.

Dragan Živadinov's performance *Noordung Biomechanics* (1999)

fig. 213

On 15 December 1999, Dragan Živadinov's *Noordung* Cosmokinetic Cabinet Theatre performed a 'parabolic' art project entitled *Noordung Biomechanics* on the Russian cosmonaut training aircraft IL-76 MDK (registration n° RA 78770) at an altitude of 6,660 metres in the skies above Moscow. The aircraft was operated by a team from the Yuri Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Centre, based in Star City just outside Moscow. Živadinov's group performed the piece at zero gravity, investigating the radical changes that take place in the human body within the context of weightless theatre. The production analysed the phenomena of contemporary theatre and performance in relation to (or in spite of) a plethora of new technologies. The investigation, which was developed as an intersection of theatre, the body, mobility, subjectivity and mechanics, was based on contemporary theories of the physiological changes of the human skeleton at zero gravity. Biomechanics refers to a process that combines life with mechanics. Biomechanics is about motion and the action of forces on bodies. While the word 'biomechanics' was absent from *Webster's New World Dictionary* as late as 1983, the concept had been a powerful presence in the Russian tradition in fields ranging from theatre to physiology. In this context, I can state that what in the developed West has been connected with technology and transformation in the terminology of genetic engineering, is precisely what Russians know as biomechanics. In fact it is possible to consider biomechanics as the new artistic genetic engineering. The primary domain of biomechanics is physiology, that is, the science dealing with the functions and vital processes of living organisms and mechanical movements. Biomechanics, which was first investigated by Leonardo da Vinci in the Renaissance, is today widely used in military medicine.

The director, Vsevolod Meyerhold (b. 1874—d. 1942), who developed ideas of a revolutionary theatre in which the stage is perceived as a mobile space with constructivist elements, introduced biomechanical elements into theatre as agents of dramatically performed actions.

With multiple references to the social, the political, and the physiological, Živadinov distinguishes three stages in the development of

biomechanics, each characterised by its own technological gadgets, political meaning and approach to the human body:

- 1 Historical biomechanics (prior to World War II).
- 2 Telepresence biomechanics (beginning with World War II and, I might add, connected with the expansion of research in rocket technology and astronautics).
- 3 Cosmic biomechanics (inaugurated by Živadinov's 'parabolic' art project, *Noordung Biomechanics*).

Historical biomechanics can be seen as the period of optical technologies; radio is the most important medium, and the body of the actor who takes part in a historical biomechanical performance is that of an acrobat. In telepresence biomechanics, television has become the central apparatus; so it is not difficult to see a connection with our own era of electronic technologies and images. The actor is no longer an acrobat but an experimental body (possible examples, are the American artist Cindy Sherman, the Kyoto-based artist collective Dumb Type, the French artist Orlan and the Australian performer Stelarc). In the case of Cindy Sherman, the body is a screen used for all sorts of changes, a total masquerade of identity. A Dumb Type actor is not a theatre character, but a life character. The leading actor in Dumb Type was an AIDS bomb, himself a reservoir of HIV — he was the virus and a continual reminder of the viral potential that waits to become the reality of illness. When he died he became Real. Orlan represents a pre-final form of the cyborg, a modern Frankenstein who takes cosmetology much more seriously than cosmology. Stelarc is a potential cyborg (with muscles manipulated through the Internet).

The computer, or as Živadinov calls it, 'intelligent television', points the way to the next level of biomechanics. Cosmic biomechanics implies the politics of the digital machine; it follows a path from talking-head linear television to a three-dimensional form of living at zero gravity. His *Noordung Biomechanics* theatre is all about the science of motion and the action of forces on bodies. The project involves various bodies in parallel worlds — physical bodies, sexual bodies, social bodies, media bodies and political bodies. Each territory produces a border body. In cosmic biomechanics, the change no longer

takes place only in the muscles but in the skeleton itself. Russian astronaut Sergei Krikalev, who spent more than a year in space in a zero-gravity environment, showed this clearly: according to Živadinov, he experienced changes in his bones and skeletal structure. For Živadinov, biomechanics is no longer a question of psychodynamics, but of space vectors. This is why Živadinov talks about 'Krikalev's vector.' In cosmic biomechanics, the actors are vectors.

Real bodies invaded zero-gravity space, presenting a vertiginous display of their very depthlessness. This depthlessness carries a political re-articulation of the first, second, and third worlds. Relying on time, having the possibility to access any place on earth through the Internet for example, being constrained only by the speed of the connections of our modems — all this creates a fake sense that all space is available. Certain places and territories can therefore easily disappear. It is possible to understand *Noordung Biomechanics* as the re-articulation of this situation. In short, if certain spaces are becoming 'zero,' are being erased from our vision, such as Eastern Europe with its specific history, for example, then making visible this zero-historical position is possible only in zero gravity, out of the world, in an Other (parallel) space.

In *Noordung Biomechanics* both theatre and performance meet the real. If we think about theatre as a symbolic space of pure representation and about performance as an activity in which the actor articulates his or her own non-mediated reality, then the *Noordung Biomechanics* actor transformed into an astronaut is the traumatic real of theatre and performance. Why? One should bear in mind that the real, the indivisible remainder that resists its reflective idealisation, is not 'a kind of external kernel which idealisation, symbolisation is unable to swallow, to internalise, but the irrationality, so to speak, the madness, of the very founding gesture of idealisation/symbolisation'.

Marina Gržinić and Aina Šmid

On the Flies of the Marketplace (1999)

fig. 223

On the Flies of the Marketplace is a video that deals with the idea of the European space, divided up and sacrificed. Using documents from books and magazines, the video raises the question of re-reading European space: Eastern and Western Europe. With references to history, philosophy (Kant) and the arts,

the video elaborates on the idea of Eastern Europe as the indivisible remainder of all of Europe's atrocities.

It brings together two important approaches in the aesthetics of European film production, namely, Bergman and Godard. In the video, the figure of Eddie Constantine — a private detective who, like James Bond, is addicted to alcohol, women and action — is transposed to the famous scene from Bergman's *The Seventh Seal* 1956, in which a man plays chess with Death. All the formal elements of the chess scene in *On the Flies of the Marketplace* are identical to those in Bergman's film, including the actors' gestures, the staging, and the camera angles; the chess players, however, are radically different. They are 'reincarnations' of Giulietta Masina from Fellini's *La Strada* 1954 and the title character from István Szabó's *Mephisto* 1981, who takes the role of Death. In this way, Death is re-presented through the doubling of characters and ritualistic symbolism. Other characters, such as Mia Farrow from *Rosemary's Baby* 1968 and the boxer Jack Dempsey, as well as Mafia emblems play important roles in the video, since American capitalism has always been about demons, sports and the Mafia. The tempo in the video grows elliptically from hallucination, schizophrenia, apathy, and sexual frustration to a sudden eclipse in a mute finale: the cadavers from the Costa Gavras film *Missing* 1982 are brought to life. The video also implies a twisted subversion of the Godard film *Masculin-Féminin* 1966. *On the Flies of the Marketplace* plays on citations, a mixture of genres, styles, documentary footage and montage without continuity, while focusing on strategies that seek to subvert from the inside the Western system of aesthetics-ethics-visuality.

Eclipse

(est. 1999)

fig. 239

Eclipse is a female duo that first exhibited publicly in 1999. Projects such as their reworking of Edouard Manet's *Breakfast on the Grass*, which they usually present with an opening performance, question, on the one hand, the erotic and representational and, on the other, the kitschy and pornographic. The photographs from the series *Pornorama* 2001 are based on the idea of a re-articulation of heroes from mythology and a deconstruction of the history of erotic imagery. Renaissance icons and nature are displayed through 'body panoramas', which are

perceived as territory and a living circulatory instrument. The photographs question the representational system of naked bodies, with reference to mythology and computerised mass-media imagery. Digitalised pornorama bodies expose a relationship between the one who needs to live and the one who is in a certain way framed in history.

Eclipse points to the ecstatic disposition of the self, trying to undo cognitive and historical mastery. At first the photographs denote that which is self-identical to all human beings, but then suddenly there is a twist that reveals a split between official art history, with its abstract images of knowledge, and the spectral situation of kitsch, politics and action. One 'she' from the duo is always performing in front of the camera, as the kitschy porno-functional body, while the other 'she' is behind it. The body within Eclipse is not a pre-existing thing, but rather is a fragile, shifting and continually constructed (thing) — 'this bloody object', which is constantly being produced through performative actions.

In Eclipse's photograph *Blood is Sweeter Than Honey* from the series *Pornorama* 2001, several artists — including Jeff Koons, Pedro Almodóvar, Marina Abramović, Annie Sprinkle and Madonna — already claim certain parts of the body in the imaginary map of power and in the capitalist art market that regulates and distributes the selling and consumption of images. Being attached to certain figures and elements is a parasitic sign of particular inclusion/exclusion in history and in the spiral nodes of power. Eclipse reveals these 'power maps' by positioning a proper body within the syntax of a given photograph, formed through a certain set of cultural conventions. The result is to show that the master artist, each with her or his cannibalistic attitude towards one part of the body, loses part of her or his priority and originality precisely by being dismantled by this mimetic post-socialist double. Eclipse effectuates this mimetic double, displacing the original image and revealing that it is in itself nothing more than a series of displacements, thus diminishing its claim to a purely authentic meaning.



From left to right and top to bottom:

OHO *Mount Triglav* 1968

The Ljubljana Alternative or Subcultural Movement —

The Ljubljana Lacan School — Slavoj Žižek 1980s

Video still taken from Gržinić & Šmid *Retroavantgarde* 1997

Laibach *Laibach interview* 1983

Neue Slowenische Kunst / NSK *Group portrait* 1986

Fiction Reconstructed 1986–2001

Metelkova *Metelkova* 1991

IRWIN *Black Square on Red Square* 1992

Dragan Živadinov *Noordung Biomechanics* 1999

Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid *On the Flies of the Market Place* 1999

Eclipse *Blood Is Sweeter Than Honey* 2001

East Art Map Online Proposals

Compiled by Nataša Petrešin

Maja Bajević (b. 1967 Sarajevo. Lives and works in Paris and Sarajevo.) and **Emanuel Licha** (b. 1971 Montreal. Lives and works in Paris and Montreal.)

Green Green Grass of Home 2002

video (17 min), drawing, photographs

fig. 236

The work of Maja Bajević is strongly connected with her personal biography, which to a great extent has been determined by the political and social circumstances that governed the former Yugoslavia during the final decade of the twentieth century. In fact, this interaction between personal/private and social/public — the re-examination of her own experience and identity, as well as situating and positioning herself as a social being in the newly created social context and historical time and space — has largely determined the fields of reference and the direction of her artistic activities.

Times of war, and the political maelstrom are agents, not only of the process of catharsis through which the artist passes, forming a critical distance towards the currently dominant ideological, political and national propositions, but also of the re-examination of the truths and/or delusions that she grew up with in her former life (before the last war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and the former Yugoslavia). Meanwhile, in choosing to position herself as a dissident, Bajević reveals her affinity with those politically invisible people who do not belong or do not want to belong to any of the prevailing collectivities, or her affiliation with the marginalised female sex, the sensibility, discourse and outlook of which is the recognisable starting point and constant in her work.

Maja Bajević's ability to express through her own personal position — built upon individual and collective experience — the spirit

of the times, the *Zeitgeist*, and the ills of society (hypocrisy, political and religious opportunism, the manipulation of the masses and hatred of the other), evinces that rare quality of individual artistic engagement, which in the current social environment we recognise and welcome as a critical and moral corrective.

In *Green Green Grass of Home*, Bajević's collaborative project with the Canadian/French artist Emanuel Licha, we see Bajević recalling memories of her apartment in Sarajevo, which belonged to her grandparents. Because of the war the apartment was occupied and the artist was unable to visit it again. In the video she is seen from a distance, walking on the grass and describing the apartment room by room from memory, thus drawing an imaginary map not only for the viewer, but also for her artist collaborator. Following her description, Licha drew an actual map and designed a model, in which both of them are seen standing happily in a photograph that accompanies the project. The project reveals the power of an autobiographical story with inherent criticism of the media spectacle about the war presented through the use of narration and flat green land as a projection screen for all the untold war stories that this story suggests.

Proposed by Inke Arms

Written by Dunja Blažević, with additions by Nataša Petrešin

Conceptual Art from Vojvodina 1970s–80s

Media Ontology — Mapping Art and Social History in Novi Sad

fig. 59, fig. 60, fig. 61

After breaking off relations with Stalin and most communist countries at the end of the 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s, Yugoslavia experienced a kind of democratisation, which influenced the artistic and

cultural scene dominated at that time by social realism. Moderate modernism became the mainstream cultural framework for the young socialist state in the 1950s. In 1954, in Novi Sad, the Youth Tribune was established as a cultural centre that strongly promoted modernist art and culture, and free speech and dialogue about contemporary social and political issues.

The Youth Tribune was influenced by the international youth movements that culminated in the events of 1968. Youth movements and radical artistic and social practice from Yugoslavia provoked a dominant discourse of moderate modernism at that time. The most radical demands for the democratisation of culture came from artistic and cultural circles in Novi Sad gathered around the Serbian language magazine *Fields* (*Polja* in Serbian), *New Symposium* (*Uj Symposium* in Hungarian), the student magazine *INDEX*, the film company Neoplanta and especially around the cultural centre the Youth Tribune. The character of these practices was multicultural, experimental, new leftist, international, and linked with other cultural centres in Ljubljana, Zagreb, Belgrade, Budapest, Berlin, Paris, etc.

Significant protagonists on the artistic scene at that time were members of the KôD group (Slavko Bogdanović, Slobodan Tišma, Mirko Radojičić, Miroslav Mandić and sometimes Janez Kocijančič, Peđa Vranešević, Branko Andrić, Kiš-Jovak Ferenc), the January, February and March groups (Čedomir Drča, Vladimir Kopicl, Ana Raković and sometimes Miša Živanović), and (Æ group (Čedomir Drča, Vladimir Kopicl, Mirko Radojičić, Ana Raković and sometimes Slobodan Tišma and Peđa Vranešević), who worked in the sphere of linguistics, performance, process art and conceptual art with a strong emphasis on intertextuality and interdisciplinarity. They were all strongly influenced by Ludwig Wittgenstein, Marshall McLuhan, Mallarmé, Guy Debord, Duchamp, Malevich, OHO, Art & Language, Joseph Kosuth, Dejan and Bogdanka Poznanović. Strong influence also came from Vojvodinian film production (gathered around the Neoplanta film production company), which produced the so-called 'black wave' through individuals such as, Želimir Žilnik, Dušan Makavejev or Karpo Aćimović Godina.

Slavko Bogdanović undertook linguistic analyses of arbitrarily selected words. One of his most famous works was *Turnover Tax* 1970, in which he aestheticised an economic explanation of the turnover tax. Slavko Bogdanović also produced a magazine for

the development of interpersonal relations — *L.H.O.O.Q* 1971 — a comic about the KôD group where, among other graphic symbols, he used the taboo sign of the swastika (both clockwise and anti-clockwise) to present the history of KôD.

Mirko Radojičić analysed the term conceptual art and aesthetic principles in his works such as *Text I* 1970. Miroslav Mandić made a parody of the gallery system and during one of the group's exhibitions he openly provoked the state apparatus (*Youth Cultural Centre in Belgrade*, 1971). Slobodan Tišma explored methods for constructing a verbal text, and under the influence of Stephan Mallarmé and Malevich he analysed and deconstructed geometric systems (1970).

A significant and pioneering exploration into new media or extended media at that time was made by Bogdanka Poznanović, who used photography, film, video and who also established the first intermedial class in the former Yugoslavia. Poznanović also explored systems of communication. She was part of a worldwide community of mail artists (*Project Feedback Letter Box* 1973). Another artist who explored and used different media in her work was Katalin Ladik who worked predominantly in the field of performance and vocal expression (*Phonopoetica* 1976). She was also part of Bosch+Bosch, a group that was active in northern town of Subotica, near the Hungarian border.

An important part of the artistic strategies that are a common signifier for these groups was reducing the importance of authorship. This is strongly emphasised in the works of the January group, the February group and the March group. Members of KôD and (Æ created these groups and worked, acted and performed so that during January they called themselves the January group and, during February, the February group. The strategy became quite interesting since during performances (such as the *Youth Cultural Centre in Belgrade* in January 1971) they provoked strong negative feedback from audiences and after that from the media. They made assemblages with faeces, openly and publicly attacking the cultural and political establishment (*Open Letter to the Yugoslav Public* 1971).

The Youth Tribune's critique of Yugoslav society at that time came from a non-dogmatic radical leftist position (there were a wide range of anarcho-liberal, Marxist, situationists, Trotskyist and Maoist ideas) that endangered the exclusive right of the state to practice Marxist and leftist ideologies. The state reaction

corresponded with the victory of party hardliners (between 1972–4). Until that time, culture, media, and even politics and the economy had been relatively liberated areas of culture.

Following the reaction of the state apparatus, Slobodan Tišma cancelled his public art practice and together with Čedomir Drča created several works and performances that dealt strongly with the death of utopian projects and the end of modernism. It is interesting that after the state reaction most of the artists sooner or later reduced their presence on the cultural scene, some among them stopped working or started to symbolically perform these attitudes as a reaction to the new situation. There were works such as *Invisible art*, *Invisible band* or *Invisible artist* that were part of a time-based performance called *THE END* that took place from 1972–7. During that time Slobodan Tišma and Čedomir Drča drank American Coca Cola and Russian Kvas every day with friends in front of a local store. This performance presented a strong ideological and political dimension for the desired autonomy of art, declaring the avant-garde's artistic acknowledgment of the defeat of art in the clash with the ideological state apparatus. This period coincided with the end of utopias and the avant-garde experience from one side and the appearance of popular punk and new wave movements on the other side (1972–7) that encouraged these artists to start to work again in a somewhat changed cultural environment. At that time they were deeply involved in the sub-cultural scene and were spending time away from art institutions that were occupied by state aparatchicks.

Unfortunately, the local art infrastructure and the critics at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s did not have the mechanisms and tools to process the rich artistic and cultural activities that were happening right in front of their eyes. This specific 'cultural heritage' vanished from the public sphere after the state's intervention and became part of the local mythology. These artists began to deny art in general, engaging in escapism and the symbolic death of utopia, which was a similar destiny to that of other utopian and avant-garde movements in the mid 1970s. KôD and (Æ called into question moderate modernist values, and the defined boundaries between different forms of art as well as the boundaries between art, culture and politics.

They were acting from inside the mainstream cultural and youth state institutions, a position that was at that time quite rare in Yugoslavia and Eastern Europe. Since the provocation of the state apparatus

and ideology crossed the imaginary boundaries of the state's tolerance, the state reacted, thus confirming its position in the hierarchy of power. The state apparatus completely replaced the editorial boards of institutions and magazines with agents and bureaucrats, who imprisoned some of the protagonists on the scene. They also banned the distribution of critical films.¹

The question of today's so-called new media and the exploration of media is quantitatively identical to the problems that the neo-avant-garde of the 1960s and 1970s dealt with while conducting experiments with installations, video and electronic sound. These problems dealt with the question of the relationship between medium and content, i.e. what is new in new media. Media research is the history of the research of communication and extroversion, while simultaneously seeking the channels to address the masses and send a message. The avant-garde's aspiration to penetrate society and lead it in a utopian project of creating a just society is closely connected to media research.

Proposed and written by Zoran Pantelić and
Kristian Lukić, New Media Centre_kuda.org,
Novi Sad

Vuk Ćosić

(b. 1966 Belgrade. Lives and works in Ljubljana.)

Documenta Done 1997

net.art project

www.ljudmila.org/~vuk

fig. 195

Vuk Ćosić belongs to the small group of contemporary Internet art pioneers and is a co-founder of the ASCII Art Ensemble (together with Walter van der Crujisen and Luka Frelih). The term 'net.art' was, allegedly, taken from an anonymous email received by Ćosić in 1995. A virus had infected the email and the content of the message was rendered unreadable, the only recognisable word that remained was 'net.art.' From that moment, the term 'net.art' was used to denote a variety of practices and activities by groups of leftist intellectuals, subversive and conceptual artists to which Ćosić belonged. Exchanging ideas and distributing information through the Internet via Bulletin Board Systems, forming mailing lists and discussion forums like nettime.org, thing.net and rhizome.org, the activities and domains encouraged and more or less unified the net.art community from 1995–6.

Documenta Done 1997, one of the artist's most renowned actions, is an appropriation of the website

of *Documenta X* in Kassel which was declared as shut down by the organisers. Ćosić cloned the website to his own domain just before the closing of the website happened, as a protest against the tendency of mainstream information distributors to delete (and thus privatise) the contents from the server when an event is over. All the information relating to *Documenta X* is still available on Ćosić's domain.

Another important project, *History of Art for Airports* 1997, deals with the question of the historicisation of a certain medium (time-based art in this case), which is also the question that Ćosić addresses in his recent exhibitions and curatorial projects regarding the problems of the historicisation of net.art itself.

Proposed by Sašo Dimitrievski

Written by Nataša Petrešin

Albert Heta

(b. 1974 Prishtina. Lives and works in Prishtina.)

Kosovar Pavilion 2005

fig. 243

Albert Heta is part of the young generation of artists in Kosova that appeared on the scene immediately after the war in 1999. Heta's work is characterised by simple and refined formal qualities, and daring, straightforward political messages. His concerns are often local and national, expressed without any regard for 'political correctness'. Rather than being mere political propaganda, however, Heta's work — through its particular social concerns — reveals the hypocrisy, the collective lies, and the ironies of the contemporary world.

Heta's art is free from any kind of artistic symbolism and metaphor. His works are often simple acts of intervention into an existing social condition, situation or object. While the intervention is always in turn, it triggers the insurgence of an unofficial existing reality, which the official condition/object/situation hides or has simply dismissed. The result is the removal or destruction of the function of the existing object/situation, since its hypocrisy has been openly revealed.

In fact, Heta's work often risks being considered simply as political propaganda. For many of his works seem to be too direct in their dialectics. However, the refined aesthetic and conceptual qualities make his work more than just 'political pamphleteering' (Shkëlzen Maliqi). It is clear that Heta is not interested in pathetic protesting, nor is he asking for anyone's

sympathy. He is simply and calmly showing another reality, a parallel reality, still unaccepted and dismissed. Furthermore, Heta does not simply suggest this other reality, he imposes it. And this is ultimately his strongest point.

His latest project, *Heta's Kosovar Pavilion in the Venice Biennale* 2005 was sent out as an email announcement by e-flux in early June 2005 and the majority of the art world, at the time of writing this text, believe that there will be a Kosovar Pavilion in Venice. Of course there is no Kosovar Pavilion since Kosova is not a state. Instead of the pavilion the space is to be used for a party. And yet doesn't the fact that the majority of people believe that there will be a Kosovar Pavilion and that there will actually be a party called the Kosovar Pavilion, make this pavilion a reality?

There are always drawbacks in socially and politically engaged art — it is art, and as such its effects on social awareness and social change are always minimised. Therefore, any attempt at changing society requires a leap to actual political participation, in which case the work is no longer considered as art. To avoid this fearful situation, the artist must stick to the safe game of conceptual allusions and creative suggestions. Heta, however, does not want this safe game. Instead he chooses to be direct in his approach. Looking at Heta's work, we also realise that this game of allusions is an exhausted game, and inappropriate for today's political and social situation.

Proposed by Vala Osmani

Written by Vesa Sahatçiu

Boro Ivandić

(b. 1951 Putešvica, Croatia)

BWA, late 1970s — early 1980s

fig. 109

In the late 1970s and early 1980s Boro Ivandić worked as a graphic designer for the student newspaper *SL* where he drew black and white comic strips that criticised the rise of consumerism. His major project at the time was *BWA*, a fictional company that produced nothing other than its own image. He created its visual corporate identity, posters and packaging. It is interesting to note that the author of a review from *Polet* magazine writes about Ivandić's approach to *BWA* as 'overidentification', the mechanism of subversive affirmation attributed to Laibach. At the time, the Croatian cultural scene considered Ivandić's work to be of a post-Warholian nature, but today it

could also be thought of as cultural jamming and part of the pre-adbusters phenomenon. Due to its marginal or rather provincial situation it fell between two points: being too late and at the same time too early.

Proposed and written by Dejan Kršić

Olia Lialina

(b. 1971 Moscow. Lives and works in Moscow.)

My Boyfriend Came Back from the War 1996

net.art project

www.teleportacia.org

fig. 194

Net artist, media critic and curator Olia Lialina stormed the already fermenting world of net.art with her historical piece *My Boyfriend Came Back from the War* sometime in the early autumn of 1996. This deceptively simple work was the first successful hybrid of hard-core innovative media formalism and old school artistic talent. Even today this work remains one of the most frequently cited stand-alone titles from the heroic period of online arts. Navigation through the work's structure of words, images and intersections engages the participant/viewer in a mixture of spoken and unspoken conversations, mixed messages and expressions of hope, anxiety and personal anticipation. Visually one field stays unchanged while the rest of the screen divides itself into multiple static frames where the viewer uncovers the messages and conversations.

With her activities as a practitioner, as well as a lecturer and teacher, Lialina has established herself as one of the most recognisable voices in netart.

Proposed and written by Vuk Ćosić, with additions by Nataša Petrešin

Alexei Shulgin

(b. 1963 Moscow. Lives and works in Moscow.)

386DX 1998

music performances

www.easylife.org

fig. 192, fig. 193

Alexei Shulgin, artist, musician, curator and activist, is one of the key protagonists of the first generation or 'classics' of net.art. As an avid participant in the early reflections on the artistic potential of the Internet, Alexei was able to substantially contribute to the direction this short-lived art form took on a global scale. With artworks and essays, as well as with his charismatic presence he always had a high standing

in the otherwise suspicious and uncontrolled space outside the boundaries of the art world. His ironic criticism of the technology hype of the mid-1990s is present in all his work.

Following the now-legendary proclamation of the death of net.art, Alexei has devoted his energy to a successful music project *386DX* and to research into software art, in which arena he is now one of the most exhibited protagonists. In 1998 Alexei founded his cyberpunk band *386DX*, consisting of a redundant generation of computers that played and sang popular songs of the last thirty years live in a series of performances. Josephine Bosma wrote that, with this band,

Alexei Shulgin not only includes these redundant technologies, but manages to show us the redundancy of our own pop culture by covering 30 years of pop music and making the result sound like all songs were created at the same time: just now.

Alexei Shulgin's profile in the art history of the last decade is now global and his influence indelible.

Proposed and written by Vuk Ćosić, with additions by Nataša Petrešin

Nebojša Šerić Šoba

(b. 1968 Sarajevo. Lives and works in New York.)

Untitled 1998

photograph

fig. 206

In his photography, performances and sculptures, Nebojša Šerić Šoba offers ironical and often humorous comments on socio-political conflicts and on consumerist behaviour, marketing manipulation, political hegemony, war and post-war situations, the latter coming directly from his personal experience. He is interested in showing how symbols of power manipulate and blind our perception of reality, and how transparency and emptiness exist in all layers of social and political life.

Concerning the work *Untitled*, 1998 the artist wrote:

The war — perhaps this goes without saying — really affected my life. I had so many problems after it; the only important thing for me to do was find peace and my own

identity. I felt torn between my past and my future, between art and politics, between being human and animal, between peace and war. I attempted to address this confusion in my work *Untitled*.

During the war in 1995 the artist received a present from an anonymous brigade photographer — a photograph of the artist himself, dressed for duty as a soldier in the Bosnian army, standing in a trench on the hilltop of Žuč, one of the most dangerous front lines surrounding Sarajevo. Three years after the war, Šoba happened to be in the south of France, on the Mediterranean coast. He took a photograph of himself in a similar position to the one from the trench:

Looking at one and then the other in the blink of an eye gives an impression of the non-existence of time and distance, and of the absurdity of going from one situation to another. The gap between these two photographs is the untold story of the film that will never be exposed or the book that will never be written, as well as everything that makes my life as it is today. These photos are documents of me, in two entirely different worlds.

Proposed by Inke Arns

Written by Nataša Petrešin

Weekend Art

Hallelujah the Hill 1995–2004

performances, photographs

fig. 168

Weekend Art's *Hallelujah the Hill* is a project in which Aleksandar Battista Ilić, Ivana Keser and Tomislav Gotovac rethink the conditions of production of contemporary art and of the lives and labours of contemporary artists.² Every Sunday since 1995, Ilić, Keser and Gotovac have climbed Medvednica Hill near Zagreb. In searching for an alternative expression of life, the project evolved into a 'performance without an audience' (the term used by Battista Ilić), being thoroughly documented; up to the present, thousands of photographs have been taken. As Aleksandar Battista Ilić explains, Weekend Art's *Hallelujah the Hill* is closely related to the subject of body and mind, it is the outcome of a deep friendship:

Our conversations in nature tended always to focus on literature, film, and philosophy, and on different manifestations of daily life.

Taking photographs while trying to build a friendship is without human witness. Only an archive of thousands of photographs, displayed *post festum*, make visible what was to us invisible. Today the artists use their bodies as screens, and these photographs are projected onto their naked skin. What we have here is a process to make the invisible visible and to present the unrepresentative, through a constant, persistent hesitation, once defined by Gilles Deleuze as the hesitation between 'thought without an image' and the 'new image of thought'. For Weekend Art it is more important to find the ontological ground or the environment upon which thought is built than to simply start with ideas of thought itself.

And if we also take into consideration the context of weekend art (Keser: 'No artist wants to be called a "weekend artist", because they think they are all professionals.'), we are soon forced to rethink the contemporary artist in relation to the precariousness of contemporary labour. Being weekend artists points not only to a post-conceptual condition of contemporary art's performativity, but also to a new form of art proletariat. Due to this terminally changed situation regarding labour and art, the precariousness of labour and the immateriality of life structures that suffocate and destroy millions, and enrich only a few, it is time for nature, labour and art to include everything that constitutes the human subject: its nervous system, genetic code, cortical processor, visual and auditory receptors, communication systems (particularly linguistic), its organisation of group life, etc.³ Weekend Art shows clearly that nature has to overlap with the human nervous system and visual receptors, while building communities. And finally when the artists expose their naked bodies as the most suitable screens, it seems that these lightning slide projector flashes, which burst out in the nothingness of the gallery space 'also bring about a feeling that the impossible is possible. That the necessary is contingent.'⁴

Proposed and written by Marina Gržinić

Edited by Nataša Petrešin

www.eastartmap.org

- 1 Because of its strong critical engagement and critique of the Yugoslav cultural and political establishment, the Youth Tribune was stamped down in 1974. The editorial boards of Novi Sad's artistic and literary magazines *Polja* (Fields) in the Serbian language and *Uj Simposion* in the Hungarian language, the student magazine *Index* and the film production company *Neoplanta*, were completely deposed in the period from 1972-4. In 1971, Slavko Bogdanović and Miroslav Mandić were sentenced to one year in prison because of their artistic activity.
- 2 See M. Gržinić, I. Keser, 'Is the artist an activist or an atavist?', essay to be published in *Ivana Keser* (forthcoming)
- 3 See J.-F. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Explained to Children – Correspondence 1982-1985*, Turnaround, London 1992
- 4 See J.-F. Lyotard, *Differend. Phrases in Dispute*, Manchester University Press, Manchester 1988, p.75



From left to right and top to bottom:

- Maja Bajević, Emanuel Licha *Green Green Grass of Home* 2002
 Mirko Radojičić, KôD group *Estetika* 1970
 Slavko Bogdanović Comic Book about KôD group and its Members, L.H.O.O.Q. *Underground Magazine for the Development of Human Relations* n° 9 1971
 Slobodan Tišma, Čedomir Drča *The End* 1973
 Vuk Ćosić *Documenta Done* 1997
 Albert Heta *Kosovar Pavillion* 2005
 Boro Ivandić *BWA* late 1970s–early 80s
 Olia Lialina *My Boyfriend Came Back from the War* 1996
 Alexei Shulgin *386 DX* 1998
 Nebojša Šerić Šoba *Untitled* 1998
 Weekend Art *Hallelujah the Hill* 1995–2005

Part II
Essays

EAST!

Rastko Močnik

The current mannerism to speak, and to think, about 'the East', as opposed to 'the West', both generally and in matters of art, is remarkable for several reasons:¹

- 1 It refers to a new situation in the terms of an old one. What is more, the new situation was originally meant, by its pioneers, to supersede the old one and to make its terms obsolete: the very recurrence of the old classification now sounds like an omen of defeat.
- 2 By evoking the topos 'the West and the rest',² it gives it a subtle turn: while 'the rest' gains consistency of a sort when viewed from 'the West', not only does it fall apart if left alone, but its components, like 'the East', only rise to being if and when they are articulated into an opposition with 'the West'. The mannerism then is just a shorthand for domination.

As a consequence, the opposition does not so much indicate a distinction (and there are solid grounds for one to be made), as it points to a hierarchy. And again, not so much to the hierarchy between its own terms (for this is now trivial and almost folkloristic) than to a taxonomic hierarchical order: for even before a piece, or a practice or a current from 'the East' can be spoken of in the usual terms of art (such as conceptualist, neo-avant-garde, media art and the like), it has to be affected by the qualifier 'Eastern'. By this device, what is prefixed in this way will always remain specific, over-determined, locally defined and local as opposed to what is thus promoted to the status of the general, the canonic, the over-determining — although it is, in fact, only 'Western'. This process is what is condensed in the mechanism under point 2 above.

'Eastern', of course, means 'still Eastern': prey to its own history, in accordance with point 1 above. It is specific, localised, because it is enmeshed within its own past, not emancipated from its history: while what parades as general, canonic, as the measure against which the peripheral, the provincial is to be measured — is what long ago was emancipated from its own history, from any history, for this is why it can be imposed as 'general, canonic', and as the measure, because it is a-historical. Speaking about space, one speaks of 'TimeSpace'.³ The space of the East is, within the current ideology, a timed space. Correlatively, the 'timeless' West is presented as a non-space: it is what all the local spaces are to be measured against, for they only arise to being in the face of this non-space, of the real existing utopia.

To present historicity as a degrading feature which relegates whatever it affects to the obscure margins of the periphery, and which disqualifies any eventual claim to

1. I could not have written the text that follows without my conversations with Borut Vogeltnik. With no intention to shirk the responsibility for the unavoidable stupidity of a generalist rumination, I would still like to thank him for the sheer pleasure of an intellectual adventure.

2. For an eloquent denunciation of this paradigm, see the 'Introduction' to A. G. Frank, *ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1998. For its theoretical destruction and an alternative perspective, see the main body of the book.

3. See I. Wallerstein, 'The Inventions of TimeSpace Realities: towards an understanding of our historical systems', in *Unthinking Social Science: The Limits of Nineteenth-Century Paradigms*, Polity Press, Cambridge 1991

4. This process of subordination-by-recognition has been intelligently, although in a mystified and glorifying way, described by Charles Taylor in 'The Politics of Recognition' in A. Gutmann (ed.), *Multiculturalism*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1992

5. It situates itself within the same ideological horizon as the war-mongering ideologies of the so called 'new nationalism', or, better phrased, of contemporary policies of identity and recognition.

6. The sets of cohesive mechanisms that follow have attracted the attention of scholars, and have offered opportunities to construct holistic social theories. The epistemological problem has always been that theories have mostly been limited to one of the sets, and have accordingly overestimated the impact of each. For each set we will quote, in a footnote, a corresponding theory:

1. to illustrate the problem of social theory: if it is conceptually consistent, it cannot be complete — if it wants to be complete, it cannot save its conceptual consistency, and remains, at best, eclectic; we would dare to say that this aporia is just the way the non-existence of the 'object' proper of the social sciences and the humanities takes its revenge upon theories which practice their 'knowledge' without asking the question of the conditions of the possibility of such 'knowledge';
2. to illustrate what we mean by each 'set' in more familiar, if equally stenographic terms. — For 'a', then, the

wider relevance by whoever falls prey to its grip, is not only a strong invitation to amnesia, presumably successfully consummated in the history-free 'West'. It is also already a falsification of the history that would be better forgotten.

To present an a-historical non-space as the *telos* and the norm is, of course, a suppression of history which, by the same gesture, deforms what it is suppressing. The ideology which hinges upon the 'East/West' opposition not only robs both sides of their history, it robs them both of their common history — and precludes any possibility of them having a common history in the future. For it strips them of history *tout court*. It freezes them into an eternal unequal couple, one part of which is forever doomed to struggle to get rid of its phantom past, while the other is bound to an everlasting autistic celebration of its idiocy. An eternal charm — as long as it lasts.

The history-tainted particular is not only abandoned stuck to its phantom past, it is defined by this futile and ridiculous flickering. Its vampiristic dependence forms what is popularly called its identity. An identity is the ambiguous privilege of those doomed to remain local, particular, peripheral: it is a euphemism for the incapacity to attain the serene firmament of universality. Nevertheless, it is not so bad after all: for identity is a paradoxical tool for attaining universality by missing it. Identity leads the particular into the horizon of the universal by making it recognised, by the universal, as irremediably, irreducibly particular.⁴ Thus an identity can not be, were it not recognised — recognised by some universal instance. Not only are the miserable underdogs fidgeting in their eternal time-cage, they are also desperate to find an instant of recognition to make their suffering if not worthwhile, then at least identity-conferring. And what could be more appropriate for granting recognition than the utopian a-historical senior partner? Everything is conveniently arranged within the walls of the constitutive opposition — and 'the West', by recognising the identity of 'the East', ascends to universality.

The result, though, is not that a universal a-historical 'West' confronts a particularist 'East' furnished with a history. Rather, on one side there is a plurality of historical narratives on the background of a self-sufficient universality, and on the other some unitary pseudo-history heterogeneously structured analogously to the narratives on the 'universal' side. The 'East' then acquires, first virtually, and then increasingly also actually, the structural position of any marginal group in the 'West'. The way to lose history is to conceive it in the mode of an identity-conferring narrative, regardless of whether the account is positioned here or 'there'.

It would follow that the simple opposition 'West/East' is just a symptom of the incapacity to conceive of history other than as an identity-conferring narrative.⁵ It is only an indicator of the much deeper trouble our epoch has with historical, or, put more brutally, with political thinking. To demount this simple opposition requires both a more complex approach to historicity — and a non-hypocritical confrontation with the for some time now much eschewed problem of the 'political'. That we should be led to approach these questions in a reflection on art is by no means a mere coincidence. In our times, when innovation has been banned from the systemic establishment, 'art', in its very practices, has curiously and irrepressibly affirmed itself as a zone of risk and experiment — that is, of politics and historicity.

To think together the two trajectories — and we will now give up the easy vocabulary of 'the East' and 'the West' — to think the two dimensions of 'the late modernity' together both in their contradiction and in their dialogical, agonistic historicity beyond the iron curtain of ignorance and the sanitary cordon of imposed mutism, we first have to seize the moment when they parted: the moment of historical avant-gardes. The process of modernity, in the perspective relevant to our

purpose, is a process of the 'autonomising of social spheres': the economical sphere in its capitalist mode, the state in its bourgeois formulation (a system of law and an independent field of politics, based upon the institution of the free and equal abstract individual), and 'culture'. This process of 'autonomising' immediately threatens the social cohesion (what is to keep the autonomous social spheres together, if they lack any 'transversal' integrative function, such as religion in the middle ages?) which, consequently, becomes the central and never really resolved problem of the modern age. 'Solutions' to this permanent challenge, invented during the course of the last five hundred years, although never 'definite' (and maybe precisely for reason of this open character of theirs) have proved extremely efficient and have successfully destroyed, replaced, or, rather, combined with, all other 'traditional' means invented by humanity, and have at the end of the twentieth century triumphantly confiscated the globe. They have revolved, in various unstable combinations, around a limited set of *foci*:

- 1 The homogenization of social spheres: they are not bound together, in their heterogeneity, by a transversal function which, while not belonging to any sphere in particular, dominates them all (e.g. religion, kinship structures...) — but are, by process, integrated by the functioning of the same set of structural laws which ('formally') determine them from the inside, in their very 'particular' structure.⁶
- 2 Institutional regulation, which is of two forms, a universalist and a particularist one: a. the universalist regulation is centred upon the 'juridicial fiction' of the abstract individual: free individuals, formally 'equal', practice their sociality in the ideological and institutional forms of contractual relations: b. various particularist systems of 'social care' take charge of large populations dissected and regrouped along lines drawn up according to the classifications invented by specialist knowledge and enforced by institutions of social care: as reproductive and reproducing organisms (demography), as bodies (medicine), as psyches (psychiatry), as self-styling Egos (psychotherapy, physio-techniques), etc. In short: bio-politics.⁷
- 3 The production of the effect of totality: different ideological mechanisms producing and entertaining integrative illusions, of which the closest example may be 'the nation'.⁸

Practices concerned with the production of the effect of totality tend to concentrate in the sphere of 'culture'. By a counter-effect, betraying the impossibility of their task, the cultural sphere itself is worked by processes of the 'autonomisation' of its components. In a long process of 'autonomisation', ranging roughly from Baumgarten and Lessing to the *l'art pour l'art*, the aesthetic sphere ascends to its 'autonomy' — which practically means that artistic practices start to take themselves as their own ideological background.⁹ The moment of historical avant-gardes arises when the artistic procedure is turned against this specifically modern constitution of 'art': i.e. when the artistic procedures of de-construction, immanent estrangement and corrosion seize the 'ideology of art' which, until then, had been the background upon which 'the art' was produced.

The privileged targets of the avant-garde artistic procedures were, logically, the institutions of 'the work of art' and 'the author' and the aesthetics itself — as an autonomous sphere, as a set of institutions, as discourse. As these components of the

particular example would be theories of 'reification'; more generally, the current within Marxism which believes that in a capitalist society, the 'dominating instance' coincides with the 'economic determining instance', and, while the latter takes care of itself, it informs 'all' the others under its domination, according to its internal structure; since this internal structure of the 'capitalist' economic sphere is 'commodity fetishism', a specific example of these kinds of theories would be the unstated background to Marx's elaboration on 'commodity fetishism and its secret' in *Capital Vol.1*.

7. An example of naïve fascination with 'a' would be 'theories' (or, rather, ideologies occupying the place of theoretical elaboration) of the 'civil society'. — For 'b', the corresponding theory is Foucault and, in particular, his concept of 'governmentality'.

8. Theories of the nation proliferate these days; as examples of two which precisely take into account the complex context within which the nation is to be conceptualised, we may quote Benedict Anderson and Eric Hobsbawm.

9. What we perceive as 'art' in pre-modern epochs, in retrospect and anachronistically through the eye-glasses of our notion of 'art', are practices where the background is provided by some other ideology: religious, 'humanist', political, etc. 'Artistic' is a practice which works upon such an ideological background, but does not produce exclusively, or not at all, 'ideological effects'.

modern art-sphere were just as many privileged domains of its articulation with the over-all system of modernity, the avant-garde practices, by attacking these neuralgic points, subversively confronted some of the pillars of the system: subverting the 'work of art', they attacked commodity fetishism; destroying the figure of the 'author', they confronted the Law, and specifically the Law of Property; questioning aesthetics, they brought into question the very institution of an autonomous artistic 'sphere'. The presence or the absence of a revolutionary context, though, strongly determined possible horizons of avant-garde practices.

In a revolutionary situation — or, to be precise, in cases where avant-garde practices could determine themselves as an active agent within a revolutionary situation —, it was possible for them to treat all three 'targets' together, within the same gesture. In this way, it was possible to re-articulate the three elements, the inscription of the 'old' system into the art-sphere, into a 'new', already different complex by the merely negative gesture of subversion. This re-articulation, insofar as it focused upon the pressure of the system channelled through the three critical components of the art-sphere, was popularly called, and is still called, the politicising of art. It transformed the field of artistic practices, made obsolete their former self-understanding, and re-inscribed its terms into a new conjuncture.

If the ideological co-ordinates of the pre-revolutionary situation in Russia were established by oppositions of the type 'modernisation vs. traditionalism', 'westernisation vs. Slavophily', those terms, under the new articulation, lost their force to organise fields of cultural production and ideological strife. Having ceased to organise their self-reflection along the terms of these oppositions, cultural and artistic practices could re-articulate their procedures, the modes and the terms of their production and reflection — and could construct, from 'old' pieces, a new and powerful potential of cultural action and artistic production. Within the new horizon opened by such politicising, the 'political' approach itself, although, at a first glance, developed from the 'modernist' current, revealed at least a kind of 'formal' affinity with some of the 'anti-modernist' elements — e.g. the mystique of the proletariat in the position of someone like Bogdanov, or fascination with technology in the work of Vertov. It was this 'mystical', 'irrational' component that, in Dziga Vertov's work, supported his revolution: for although he only claimed to be liberating the potential of the new technology, he brought the actual filmic realisation well beyond the then available technological possibilities. It was the 'mystical' component, too, which, in Proletkult, triggered an incipient cultural revolution with its imaginative building of innovative organisational forms of cultural production in general, and, specifically, of artistic production.¹⁰

Although this organisational effort had no future, it is of central importance to the internal logic and the specificity of avant-gardist practice in a revolutionary situation. In general, historical avant-gardes, by subverting the institution of the 'work of art', challenged the commodification in the cultural sphere, i.e. its integration into the social 'whole' under the pressure of the capitalist economy and its 'commodity fetishism'; by attacking the institution of 'the author', they challenged the ideological support of this submission, the law of property and its consequences; by dismantling aesthetic institutions and discourses, they challenged the very idea of 'totality' and the existing totalising mechanisms. The decisive 'surplus', though, the additional element which could not be developed outside the revolutionary context, was precisely the 'organisational' aspect — the multitude of practices and practical forms which broke with the inherited romanticist individualistic and neo-romanticist 'group' or 'artistic movement' logic, and

10. It seems that the cultural revolutions of the twentieth century were doomed to remain 'incipient': on the eve of the 1st congress of the Proletkult (2-12 October 1920), Lenin personally pressured Lunacharsky to make the congress relinquish the 'autonomy' of the Proletkult and to subordinate it to Narkompros, the People's Commissariat for Education; since Lunacharsky did not follow these instructions, Lenin drafted the resolution of the congress so as to be in line with his intentions. Lenin reiterated his position in a letter to *Pravda* in December 1920, which is considered to be the first direct party intervention into cultural affairs.

introduced on a mass-scale a completely new organisational concept, defined in terms of class.¹¹ While it may be excessive, although not absurd, to claim that the liquidation of this endeavour towards a revolution in specifically cultural terms contributed to the ultimate failure of the Bolshevik type of revolution, it certainly did much to further the incapacity of post-socialist art to resist the imposition of the neo-liberal organisational models, i.e. of the contemporary modes of cultural domination. For long before the governmentality had developed its contemporary forms of 'cultural management' and its institutions, its cultural and artistic 'markets', together with the re-animation of 'the work of art', 'the author', and even of an 'aesthetic' attitude with its proliferation of 'critical' discourses, often archaically styled in a 'representativist' idiom, long before our present troubles the cultural activists of a Proletkult were putting together an alternative which, had it succeeded, might have provided a different setting for the now urgent questions of the political economy of cultural and artistic productions.

The effects of the revolutionary re-articulation on the 'modernist' side resound, if only by default, as far as our contemporaneity. The effects of the re-articulation upon the other, the 'scythic,' 'nomadic,' side, though, liberated what had been practiced and produced under the blind spot sustained by the alibis of the terms of the ideological oppositions ('modernism vs. traditionalism', etc.) — and radicalised the necessity, and the possibility, of a theoretical investigation into those procedures and productions. Shortly and bluntly: procedures and tricks that have, in a synthetic way, been branded 'zaum' by Kruchonykh or 'stellar language' by Khlebnikov, are what we would now call the 'work on the materiality of the signifier'. Not only has this work established the horizon for the century to come — it had a double and dramatic effect upon the concomitant analytical and reflective practices:

- 1 It assisted them in their effort to become theoretical practices.
- 2 It enabled them to engage in a vast theoretical elaboration of 'the symbolic' in general, by way of their intimate relation to the artistic practices in particular. This other line thus provided the avant-gardist gesture with positive contents — the work upon the signifying material — contents which made it possible to go beyond the ephemeral gesticulation, and to engage in sustained practices that could articulate with other practices, and, in this way, produce deep and lasting effects upon their context. One such effect was the contribution to the epistemic break which opened the horizon of the theories of 'the symbolic' of the twentieth century — an effect that could only be achieved within the unique dialogue between artistic and intellectual practices in a revolutionary situation.

In the absence of a revolutionary situation, though, avant-garde practices remain cloistered within the autonomous art-sphere, doomed to repeat an ever-recuperated subversion of aesthetics, and to try occasional escapades out of the art-sphere which, with no historical processes to articulate to, are repeatedly rejected back towards the sterility of their autonomous domain.

Such a retreat into a specific art-sphere did occur as a temptation within the horizon of politicised art — at the moment when it was violently brought under the political monopoly which, within the same historical process, destroyed or colonised all other political and politicised practices. A renewal of 'aesthetic form' proved not to be an option, though, since it had already been declared, and

11. If all avant-garde practices challenge what, upon the list presented above, we have marked 'a' (commodity fetishism, reification), 'b' (civil society) and 'c' (the social whole, nation, etc.), only those which are articulated for a revolutionary situation, can effectively challenge what we have marked 'b' (governmentality), and develop a historically viable alternative to it.

practiced, by what was supposed to be the specifically artistic 'contribution to' the exercise of the political monopoly. Nothing less than a new re-articulation of the terms of the problem was on the historical agenda. It did occur — though not in the manner of an explicit rupture akin to the one historical avant-gardes could still perform under the aegis of the paradigm of modernity. Rather, this time, it was a multitude of unconnected and heterogeneous breaks, fulgurant attempts, brisk gestures, openings into new spaces still waiting for their topography to be described.

These processes of re-articulation and innovation, roughly located in the second half of the twentieth century, did produce certain features of a 'revolutionary' conjuncture: they were connected with the issues of their times, and 'politicised' in a way; they were socially innovative, and experimented with new organisational forms with which to support artistic, cultural, and generally symbolic practices; they were, sporadically at least, interconnected with theoretical efforts, and the concomitant theory did produce epistemic ruptures. They developed a complex attitude towards the historic past, not only intellectually, but above all practically: many of their specifically artistic productions were articulated, in a complex way, with the past, and, in a privileged way, with the very practices and achievements of the revolutionary avant-garde we have tried to sketch in this text.

Yet, these processes have been, to a large extent, swept under the carpet of what may well be called a moment of 'anti-history' which crippled the spaces of 'post-socialism' for almost a decade. They were marginalised, filtered, co-opted and rejected ... but not liquidated. They (we) now have to invent a language to speak again and to reflect, to launch their/our endeavours again. We have to fight the instant amnesia, and the precariousness even the lack of links, these articulations across the space which, despite everything, has been opened and defined by these processes and by the practices which propel them.

Published here is an attempt at mapping these unexplored, yet vividly resounding spaces.

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Against Dictionaries: The East as She is Spoke by the West Roger Conover

Language has always been the perfect instrument of empire.

— Antonio de Nebrija, *Castilian Grammar*, 1492

A

There have always been those who believe that one language is enough, and for whom the idea of home is related to the sound of voices speaking English without an accent. For such people, the idea of watching an occasional 'foreign' film is fine, as long as it does not employ subtitles. Subtitles bring to mind an unpleasant, frustrating notion: that English is still a foreign language to some — and that the Great American Cultural Conversion Project remains unfinished. Many Americans have a hard time reconciling the fact that it is the twenty-first century with the fact that not everyone in the world speaks English. Meanwhile, with more and more talk about refugees, otherness, diversity, and illegal immigrants, the Homeland Accent Alert is rising. On days of highest alert, the language of the West, the hegemonic language, is under direct threat of attack. As English — the language of technology, urbanity, entertainment, and business — begins to sense its isolation, its defenders become aggressive and paranoid to compensate for their lack. 'If identity is shaped by language,' writes Steven Kellman in *The Translingual Imagination*, 'then monolingualism is a deficiency disorder.' Surrounded by languages he doesn't understand, the President of English seeks ways to fight back: 'For each jargon (each fiction) fights for hegemony; if power is on its side, it spreads everywhere ... when power is against it, the rivalry is reborn, the jargons split and struggle among themselves.'¹ As boutique countries reach out beyond their national language to operate in different cultural spheres, and as massive, incomprehensible worlds of Chinese and Arabic speakers begin to get their message across, the republic of English is becoming more and more perplexed. It perceives enemies on all sides. Roland Barthes anticipated this condition in *The Pleasure of the Text*:

The only survivors are the systems (fictions, jargons) inventive enough to produce a final figure, the one which brands the adversary with a half-scientific, half-ethical name... So it is, among others, with certain vulgates: with the Marxist jargon, for which all opposition is an opposition of class; with the psychoanalytic jargon, for which all repudiation is avowal; with the Christian jargon, for which all denial is seeking, etc.²

1. R. Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, Hill and Wang, New York 1975, p. 28

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 28-9

B

Rarely do Western intellectuals expose their limitations more transparently than when trying to offer critical interpretations of the East. Before embarking on such an effort, they would do well to consider the predicament of José da Fonseca and Pedro Carolino who, in 1855, faced a serious challenge as they sat down to write an English phrasebook for Portuguese students: they didn't know any English. Their task was made even more difficult by the fact that they didn't have access to an English-to-Portuguese dictionary. Undaunted, they set about their task of constructing an English guidebook using the only resources they had — a Portuguese-to-French dictionary and a French-to-English dictionary. The bizarre result of this endeavour — published in 1855 as *O Novo Guia da Conversação, em Portuguez e Inglez, em Duas Partes* (*The New Guide of the Conversation, in Portuguese and English, in Two Parts*) — became infamous as one of the most unintentionally humorous and aberrational lexicons ever produced. Often featured in literary accounts of tortured English, it remained in print under the title *English as She is Spoke* for the rest of the nineteenth century — a freak exhibit of linguistic mistakes.³ Today, *English as She is Spoke* has lost much of its bizarreness; it reads as a precocious, even plausible example of how globalisation functions, the phrases actually approximating how English is spoken in much of the world today. Not only The West as She is Spoke by The East, but The East as She is Spoke by the West.

C

In his preface to *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, Michel Foucault makes reference to a 'certain Chinese encyclopedia' entitled *Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge* which he came across while reading Borges's 'The Analytical Language of John Wilkins'.⁴ While Foucault finds wonderment in the taxonomy of the Chinese encyclopedia itself, where for example animals are divided into such polymorphous categories as:

(a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) et cetera, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies, etc.

what he finds more astonishing is the system of classification which erases distance and difference between the list's parts: 'what transgresses the boundaries of all imagination, of all possible thought, is simply that alphabetical series (a, b, c, d) which links each of those categories to all the others.'⁵ Foucault is arrested by the violent collision between Eastern perception and Western order. Implicit in his observation is the fact that all classification systems, whether maps, dictionaries, or exhibitions, are inherently ideological constructions reflecting the social, political, and cultural values of the contexts in which they originate. A map is a polemic first, a locator second.

3. J. da Fonseca, P. Carolino, P. Collins (ed.), *English As She Is Spoke: Selections from O Novo Guia da Conversação, em Portuguez e Inglez, em Duas Partes* (*The New Guide of the Conversation, in Portuguese and English, in Two Parts*), McSweeney's Books, San Francisco 2002

4. Foucault encountered the Chinese encyclopedia reading Borges's text on John Wilkins's *Essay Toward a Real Character and a Philosophical Language* (London, 1668). In this remarkable book, Bishop John Wilkins presents a universal language of philosophy together with a written and spoken lexicon that maps the terms of the ontology in English. M. Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, Vintage, New York 1994

5. *Ibid.*, p. xv

D

Dictator (dic-ta-tor), noun.

- 1 An instrument into which speech is entered and recorded.⁶
- 2 One who speaks into such an instrument, testing his voice (123456789) or running arbitrary patterns: ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ.
- 3 The chief of a nation, its Alpha.

It has been said that English is a disaster waiting for a dictator. Since the English-speaking world is becoming ever more diverse and global, and no language-dictator has yet risen to the role of Alpha, China's central party will save the world by assuming this role. Using its authority to reform what will soon be the world's largest English (as a second language) population, it will introduce new spelling conventions, shorten the alphabet, and simplify rules of grammar to make English more Chinese-friendly. Alphabetic orthography will be replaced by a phonetic spelling system, leading to the publication of a series of national phonetic dictionaries. Eventually, these will be merged into one International Standard Dictionary for all non-native English speakers. Standard International English will be based on a limited vocabulary of approximately 1,500 words, chosen for maximum use value and ease of pronunciation. The use of foreign words will be encouraged in order to increase the spread of English among non-native speakers so that for example two Chinese speakers conversing in English will use Anglicised Chinese words if they do not know the English equivalents. The English language, with its relatively simple rules, is more conducive to this adaptation than most, and has a reasonable chance of survival if it is dirtied from the bottom up as opposed to being kept pure from the top down. Over time, if the infiltration process is successful, the English language will be armed with a vast new arsenal of words from Arabic, Chinese and other languages.⁷

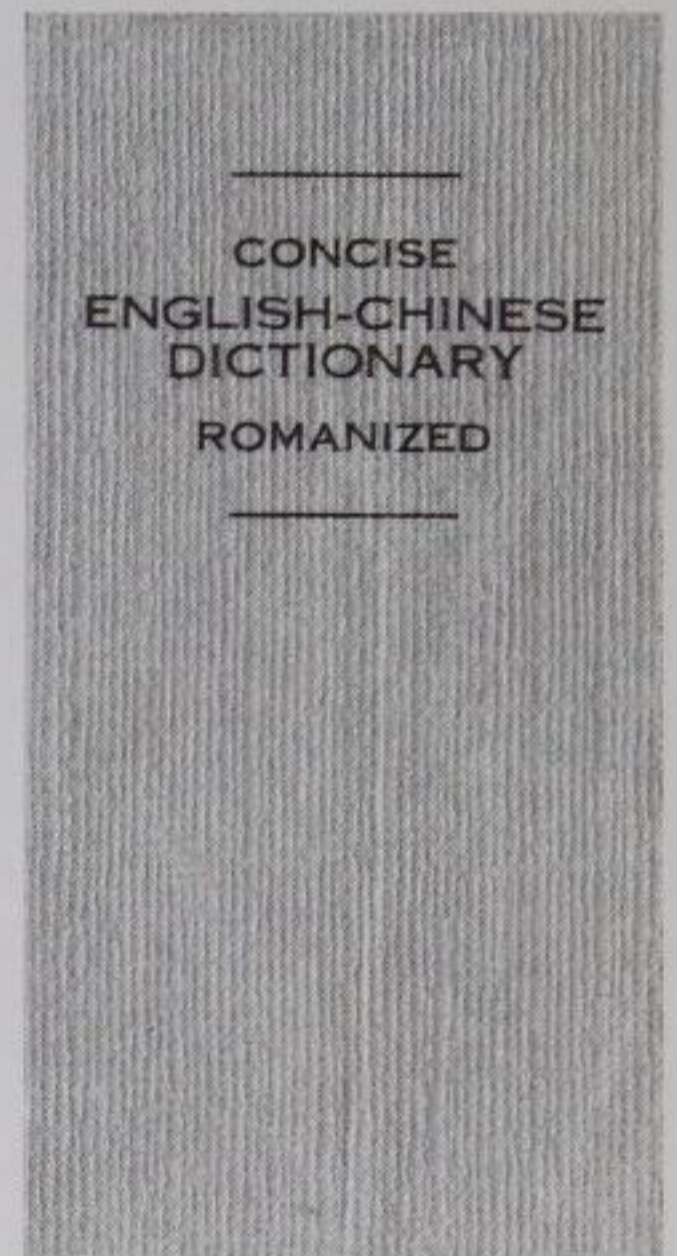
E

Neotenia (ne-o-te-ni-a), noun.

- 1 Retention of juvenile characteristics in the adults of a species.
- 2 A biological condition in which metamorphosis of an organism is inhibited, and the infantile and adult forms of the animal coexist in the same individual for its whole life.

Neotenia describes a biological condition believed to play a role in evolution, as when a species' im/mature form becomes its 'normal' mature form. Examples include flightless birds (whose proportions resemble those of the chicks of flighted birds), humans (who have sparse body hair and enlarged heads reminiscent of baby primates), and dogs (who share many mannerisms and physical features with the immature wolf).

Neotenia is also a flexibly located place on the global cultural atlas, named for people who bear neotenic characteristics. Most recently, the appellation Neotenia was used to describe the territory created by the split of a once monolithic superpower into two distinct political enclaves — the Neotenuous and the Neotenytes. The Neotenuous — named for the newly tenuous position they occupied in the political order — ascribed to themselves all of the positive features that their counterparts lacked, while the



6. Unless otherwise stated, when terms are introduced with definitions at variance with standard dictionary definitions, the definitions are mine.

7. If this hypothesis is correct, organisations such as the Académie Française (the world's most powerful state-backed linguistic authority), which serve as watchdogs of language invasion, will hasten the demise of the languages they exist to preserve.

Neotenytes projected exactly the reverse, thus fulfilling the definition of political parallax — a social antagonism allowing no common ground between conflicting agents. The two populations (collectively known as Neotenians) coexisted perfectly — mutually dependent parts of a closed system in which political transformation is impossible. As an early indicator of the post-geographic condition, Neotenia allows us to project a world in which political differences are not manifested territorially, but according to value systems, within undifferentiated space.

The neotenic condition — while it might appear to infer an underdeveloped state — is in fact (like certain systems, certain languages) engineered for survival. The adaptation allows Neotenians to survive by maintaining the youthful apparatus of and capacity for propagation even in advanced age, thus allowing the species to renew itself, while other species, whose potential is more fully realised according to some classical idea of development, is threatened with extinction upon attaining maturity's limit. According to neotenic law, it is not the most mature systems or members of a species which perpetuate culture; on the contrary, it is the immature examples, the youth.

F

Ideology (id-e-ol-o-gy), noun.

- 1 The opposite of biology.
- 2 Ideology is self-propagating and self-destroying.
- 3 Ideology can neither be verified, nor falsified. It cannot be true or false for it creates by itself what it needs to justify itself.⁸
- 4 The language of capitalist power. — Roland Barthes
- 5 The most elementary definition of ideology is probably the well-known phrase from Marx's *Capital*: 'They do not know it, but they are doing it.' — Slavoj Žižek

The Berlin Wall had fallen a million times in Europe's rehearsal for midnight, but when it finally came down, it was not just concrete and rubble that tumbled, but the entire mystique of the East. The fact of the Wall's existence had for so long necessitated the visualisation of the invisible that when real absence replaced the solidity of longing, the West's imagination was emptied. A vacuum was created, with banal shop windows and prostitutes filling the exotic spaces that fantasy had long occupied. The removal of the wall, the defeat of the system, the break-up of Yugoslavia ... it was the anticipation of events like these that made the idea of utopia possible in the West, just as it was the existence of these constructs that had given traction to the dream of utopia in the East. Under the spell of these dreams and the shade of these dreads, the idea of 'a world' was somehow possible. But as each wish materialised, as each ghost vanished, the West had less and less (left) to long for. By the end of the twentieth century, history had lost its juice:

Possessing the end is the most precious thing we have. It is the end, and only the end, which tells us that something indeed happened... When the countdown is over, and the end is looked back on, prediction and memory both cease to exist. When everything can be seen, nothing else can be foreseen.⁹

8. V. Todorov, *Red Square, Black Square: Organon for Revolutionary Imagination*, State University of New York, New York 1995

9. J. Baudrillard, 'In the Shadow of the Millennium' (translation of *A l'Ombre du millenaire ou le suspens de l'an 2000*, Sens & Tonka, Paris 1998), in www.egs.edu/faculty/baudrillard

When the Wall in Space fell, East/West distance collapsed. When the Wall of Time fell, history ceased to exist. Only a few obstacles and enemies survived the twentieth century. Ideology would have to furnish new ones.

G

Curator (cu-ra-tor), noun.

- 1 One who performs the cure or care of souls, or one who, as the representative of the incumbent of a priest or vicar, takes care of the church, and carries out divine service.
- 2 One who professes to perform the role of cure or care for artists, but who in fact takes care of the museum and its artefacts.
- 3 A kind of editor who works with language in space, for whom the wall is the page.

If the East was the mirror in which the West was reflected, the breaking of the mirror in 1989–91 created a see-through space. In what has to be one of capitalism's most revealing moments, the wall was cut up, repackaged and sold in souvenir-size bits in the shopping malls of America. At the precise moment that the Wall lost its political meaning, it acquired economic value. Just as Foucault once said of power (to analyse it is to admit it has lost its meaning), and Apollinaire once said of time (to speak of it is to acknowledge its disappearance), so too with meaning: the moment we sell it, it loses its symbolic value. It was not only the wall, but the rest of the East, in all its previous shunned existence that was suddenly curated into contemporary existence. Its art, having been emptied of the political content that motivated it, began flowing into the West, showing up in markets, and having prices put on it. As quickly as it was denuded of the meaning and context of the system it was produced in, it was absorbed by another system, spun, and normalised in its new setting.

The new art that came into view was a product of its own banishment. To the extent that the forbidden was now desired, it was desired even more if it critiqued the system which had excluded it — not totalitarianism, which had given art its strategic function and sharpened its survival tools — but the Western market system, in which a market-less form of expression — a language without translators — now had to compete. Into this system, artists who had spent their lives critiquing the system did not have a difficult time pressing the buttons of the West, and thereby assuaging the West's famous need to show its shame and expose its guilt. Like the encounter between neotenytes and the neotenuous, two dysfunctional elements of the same organism that together formed a functional, co-dependent hybrid, Western curators and Eastern artists fell into a sado-masochist co-dependency — one side expert at being hurt, the other expert at subjugating. Each accepted without prejudice the Marxian inversion of subject and object, making it all right for artists to 'like' that which subliminally oppressed them, and for curators to mistake abuse for absolution.



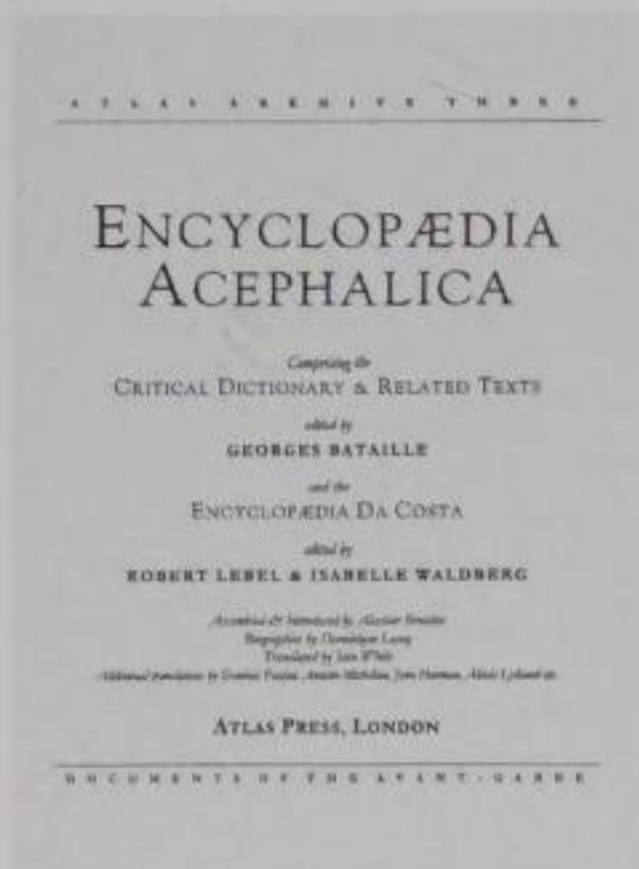
H

East (east), adjective, adverb, noun, verb.

- 1 West of west.
- 2 The cardinal compass point that is at 90 degrees, directly opposite to the West.
- 3 Although East was first used to refer to 'communist states' in 1951, natives of eastern Germany and the Baltics were referred to as easterlings as early as the sixteenth century.
- 4 Scorching and destructive, as the east wind in Biblical Palestine (cf. Ezek. xvii.10); ultimately from an Indo-European word meaning 'to shine', which also produced the English term aurora.
- 5 An area about which virtually nothing is known. Wild tales tell of a tortured land dominated by the Unlife, or a land of incredible but insane beauty, or that there is no East at all: that the world is actually flat and that ships sail off the earth.

European museums mounted a string of exhibitions on the contemporary art of Eastern Europe in general and the Balkans in particular, in the first years of the third millennium, the most ambitious of which were *In Search of Balkania*, *Blood and Honey* and *In the Gorges of the Balkans*.¹⁰ These exhibitions were ostensibly platforms for showing contemporary art from the 'east' to the 'west', but they could also be read as institutional and governmental apologies for decades of neglect and ignorance. Museums got their grants from culture ministers, curators were given their budgets and spaces, then sent off to find the newly 'importable', visa-eligible artists from the East. Hopping on a Lufthansa jet and checking out the scenes from Estonia to Skopje was not much harder than Googling. It could be done in a matter of weeks. Every major city had a Soros Center, and every Soros Center (or its contemporary art space equivalent) had a doorman of international curatorial relations. In Sarajevo it was Dunja Blažević, in Sofia it was Iara Boubnova, in Skopje it was Nebojša Vilić, in Romania it was Irina Cios, in Ukraine it was Marta Kuzma, in Istanbul it was Vasif Kortun Paşa Bey Efendi, in Belgrade it was the redoubtable gang of 'Branka and Branko', etc. It was a big deal, as Gertrude Stein (possibly) said, 'to be the one to be the one to be the one you know to be the one you have to be the one the one and only one and not the other ones'. But as with nightclubs, so with doormen. In every pocket, a list of names, a list of number ones. Tolerated outsiders soon became slumming insiders, and when temperament succumbed to temptation, it was a short distance from intellectual exchange to insider trading. Over time, some of these cultural spaces became insider spaces controlled by brokers, who in the course of consolidating power became monopolists. The Soros Centers of Contemporary Art and their successor platforms offered a shortcut to Western curators lacking the confidence or curiosity to do their own looking. They also afforded their hosts a way of colonising their mostly postcolonial guests. Museum directors and career curators forged alliances with the new Eastern power brokers aligned with institutions, and a new culture of client and partner relations was formed. A new market, and a new trading culture, was being installed.

Curatorial authority for the exhibitions was usually assumed by institutions from Western Europe. Perhaps more than for the art they showed, these exhibitions were notable for the psychopathologies they exposed. In the fifteen years since the fall of communism, the exhibition spaces of Europe have served as laboratories for



10. *In Search of Balkania*, curated by Roger Conover, Eda Čufer, Peter Weibel, Neue Galerie am Landesmuseum Joanneum, Graz, 5 October – 1 December 2002; *Blood and Honey: The Future's in the Balkans*, curated by Harald Szeemann, Kunst der Gegenwart Sammlung Essl, Vienna, 15 May – 28 October 2003; *In the Gorges of the Balkans/In Den Schluchten des Balkan*, curated by René Block, Kunsthalle Fridericianum, Kassel, 30 August – 23 November 2003

the ideas of Rancière, Said, Bourdieu, Asad, Negri, Sloterdijk, Badiou, Agamben, Latour, Žižek and many others to be tested. In ways poignant, amusing, and ironic, the rhetorics of blame, discourses of identity, narratives of trauma, and diagnoses of society were acted out in the experience of exhibition-making. Acted out, but not treated. Most of the syndromes and symptoms creating misunderstanding in the East/West art operation remain exquisitely unspoken, repeated in unconscious acts of insult, longing and frustration. While the cultural complexities of the Balkans are widely acknowledged in the texts of many art experts from both sides of this increasingly false but passionately defended idea of divide, no one has yet written a book that does justice to the intricate ecology that sustains and thwarts the inter and intra-cultural relations in the territory plotted by *East Art Map*. The elaborate system of self-protective and self-destructive mechanisms that come into play when an outside force disturbs that ecology, whether in the form of a beneficial opportunity or a dangerous threat — rarely engenders a reaction that, to Western minds, is transparent or direct.

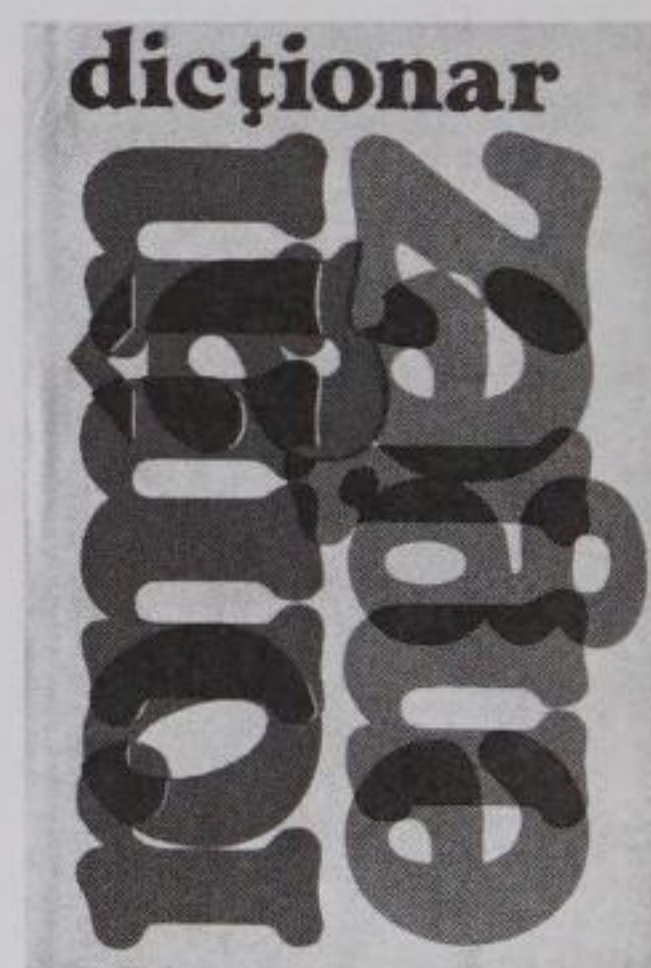
I

Translator (trans-la-tor), noun.

- 1 One who performs acts of violence on source texts. In Romance languages (*traduttore*, *traductor*), a betrayer, after the Latin *tradere*, traitor.
- 2 A woman who faithfully recomposes a literary work from one language to another. — Stendhal
- 3 A strange, nostalgic man who experiences in his own language things from another place where he is an eternal guest but never quite belongs. — Maurice Blanchot
- 4 One who disables foreigners by placing them within the prison of normality. — Ortega y Gasset

In the course of curating *In Search of Balkania*, I found myself thinking about the problem of translation in a most concrete way. All exhibitions, to one degree or another, are struggles between text and context, and can be seen as mediums for advancing the discourse of cultural translation or as sites for ambushing artistic intentions through curatorial presentation. Mistranslation is one of the non-Western artist's greatest fears when dealing with Western curators, but this concern was rarely made explicit. Rather, artists would manifest their anxieties around the issue of self-representation subliminally, by imagining the abuse that could be sustained by art objects in transit from home to host, for example. The question was typical: what happens if my piece is damaged in transit from Istanbul to Graz? Will insurance cover it? To translate means not only to carry across; it means to risk being misunderstood and therefore injured at the border. To land in another environment disfigured; to cross over and not be recognized.

Transporting anything across the borders of Eastern European countries recently at war with one another was almost impossible; nothing and everything can be insured, but these questions, which quickly became philosophical, were more than an Austrian museum intent on reducing all procedures to bureaucratic agreements was able to deal with, structurally or temperamentally. The curatorial



mandate was therefore expanded to include shipping and 'assuring' responsibilities, which meant spending as much time talking to Romanian truck drivers as Bulgarian artists, and looking at maps not just as exhibition materials but as tactical documents for moving sculpture from Skopje to Graz. Aware of the deep prejudice that exists against bringing translated texts into certain circles, but also aware of the magical transformations possible through translational acts, I sought ways to release meaning over distance by conflating the problem of cultural translation with the problem of transporting art. In this way, the material of translation was present long before the installation process began. Beginning with the choice of containers and languages of drivers, some distances were kept short, as between Serbia and Macedonia, others were necessarily drawn out, as between Albania and Romania. But just as the most difficult words to translate are often the most common ones, so too are the most challenging border crossings often the most interconnected ones. Even as the boundaries between convergent cultures seem to fade, translation/crossing can become more difficult. This political, cultural and linguistic reality will only become more apparent as the idea of United Europe evolves.

If art is part of the new language of globalisation — part of the process, in other words, through which the flow of exiles, immigrants, and intellectuals is passing — then why shouldn't the road to the exhibition — not just the exhibition itself — be where the cultural translation process begins? When a text travels from the particularity of 'its own' linguistic habitat to the very different setting of another language, the meaning of the original is usually damaged if the translator is simply converting a 'source text' into a 'target language'. Equations require proof. Thus whenever the goal of translation is equivalence between two texts, whether based on the principle of 'faithfulness' or some other comparative principle, the measure of one will not add up to the other. A dictionary is no longer the basis of translation. A good translator does not 'turn' a 'foreign' language into his own tongue; he rather attunes his ear to the voice of the other, allowing his own language to be haunted by what is not natural to it. This expansion of the discursive field is what Walter Benjamin had in mind when he spoke of the affect a good translation has on the receiving language. If bringing art works from East to West is an exercise in conditional hospitality, like non EU-citizens being granted temporary visas, it will fail. Artist and curator both have to believe that what is imported has the potential not only to adapt to the host's space, but to recondition the hosting environment.

The transportation of art works across borders can be seen as a metaphor for the transmission of ideas between cultures. Indeed, questions about injuries sustained by or value added to art works in transitional states has implications analogous to the consequences that translations have on texts. Just as literature in translation can deepen the receiver's language, so can dislocated art works relativise museum space. In the case of *In Search of Balkania*, we knew that the city of Graz was home to a huge collection of late medieval armour that local armies had once used to defend themselves against attacks from Ottoman warriors. Curating translationally meant reactivating the cultural memory of Austria's defensive posture while at the same time resisting the museum's wish to resubjugate the Balkans in the name of Austrian museum logic. Or, to take a page from the retro-avant-garde practice of NSK, 'traumas from the past affecting the present and future can be healed only by returning to the initial conflicts'.¹¹ When the first truckloads of art arrived from Istanbul, and the first artists landed from Kosova, some state art handlers on the Neue Galerie staff reacted to what they saw not as materials and talent for the making of an exhibition, but as the renewal of aggression against their balkanproof edifice.

11. IRWIN and E. Čufer, 'NSK State in Time', in E. Čufer (ed.), *NSK Embassy Moscow: How the East Sees the East*, Loža Gallery, Koper and Obalne Galeije, Piran 1992, p.15

J

Terrorist (ter-ror-ist), noun.

- 1 One who has a pessimistic view of the destiny of mankind.
— Immanuel Kant
- 2 One who commits propaganda by deed. — Peter Kropotkin
- 3 An agent or supporter of the revolutionary tribunal during the French Reign of Terror.
- 4 A member of any of certain extreme revolutionary societies in czarist Russia. — *Webster's Dictionary*, 1953
- 5 Premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against the United States or allies of the United States by subnational groups or clandestine agents, through the use of Asymmetric Warfare, usually intended to influence an audience.
(U.S. State Department definition, 2003)

Terrorism may be the only remaining verity. A more enduring concept than communism, it can unify a larger number of people and interests. It is the end that has no end, the event that has no limits, the thing without dimensions. 'Terrorism' has replaced not only 'communism' but 'fascism' as the ideology of eternal desire. Unlike the post-communist and post-fascist condition, it is impossible to imagine a 'post-terrorist condition'. Is terrorism the latest gift to art, bringing new ideas, new images, and new figures to a tired language? Has the figure of the suicide-bomber cleared the way for the suicide-artist?¹²

K

Just as the flow of history, replaced by an insatiable appetite for the real, feeds manically on the surfaces it consumes, so too does the imagination. Having sucked dry the oxygen of illusion, it sees everything and nothing as real. Desperately searching for the 'next real thing,' curators need to keep extracting juice from the world to justify their existence. The easiest place to look for that juice, that meaning, if your own world is empty, is in the places where reality still exists. Destinations: *autres espaces*, where *place* still exists, where *desire* still exists. Authentic, local, 'real' places that globalisation has not yet de-natured, where not every shop window has been designed like an installation. But five minutes after the international curatorial machinery catches on, artists are donating work to a new museum in Sarajevo, a Biennale is planned for Tirana, and Taschen is selling books in Timișoara. Between 2000 and 2006, *Manifesta* will have moved its biennale 2,000 kilometres east, from Ljubljana to Nicosia.

L

In the same airline magazine where I read this:

Nicosia has been selected to host *Manifesta 6* as it is viewed by the immediate West as the most peripheral zone of the new European Union's geographic limits.



12. Many Westerners got their first taste of this phenomenon at the recent Moscow Biennial (2005), where Oleg Kulik presented himself as the poster boy of terrorist art. His *Madonna with Children* 2004 featured a fashion photograph of a Chechen suicide bomber (Madonna) strapped with explosives (children).

I see an advertisement for *Edge Shaving Cream*: 'The Edge is Intelligence.'

I turn the page. And find there? An article reporting that the geographical centre of the Continental United States lies outside of Lebanon, Kansas, and that the Geodetic Survey has stopped calculating 'centres' due to the imprecise nature of the task. The era of centres, except those in the suburbs designed for shopping, has passed.

The Cold War will soon be a theme park, communism a fashion hook. The most reliable map of Moscow in the 1950s was produced by the CIA.

M

As soon as 'edge' countries like the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia enter the European Union, the edge shifts further east. It is now defined by Moldova, Serbia, Romania and Bulgaria, but already the curatorial engines are beginning to kick over in places like Abkhazia, Trans-Dniestr, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan. Each time a wall is torn down, what was off-limits has no limits. The locusts move in — the locust-curators. When they get the images they want, when their curiosity is satisfied and the bite is taken out, they move on, leaving the world they visited more like the one they came from. Flat. As more and more of the fresh image sources evaporate and the last of the meaning-sites dry up, curators increasingly turn the cameras on themselves.

N

But there are still a few places to go. Already rumoured as a possible site for *Manifesta 7* is Lutenblag, the artistic centre of the breakaway state of Molvanîa (described in the new *Jet Travel Guidebook* series as 'one of Eastern Europe's most overlooked destinations.'¹³ Artists from Molvanîa still live in what is for the most part an uncaptioned, untranslated, unsubtitled space, speaking a language that is so inhospitable and unreceptive to translation that even Slavoj Žižek has not yet been able to arrange the translation of a single work by his colleague Jzacol Dirj, the leading Molvanîan Lacanian.

Despite its emerging reputation as a rogue art centre, Lutenblag is a city to which very few Western gallerists have yet paid a visit. In 1998, I offered to take Marian Goodman on a studio visit there. Twice she agreed to go, but twice she cancelled due to rumours of a move against the government by the right-wing Jsalter Party. Goodman now represents a young video artist from Molvanîa, albeit one who speaks English, lives in Paris, and comes with Okwui Enwezor's endorsement. Western galleries have strict ideas about doing business with artists from the former Soviet Bloc in the post-communist era. Exceptions are sometimes made, but in general they like their Eastern artists well-groomed, well-spoken and living in Berlin, London, New York or Paris. Preferably *Documenta*-certified and with credit card.

13. S. Cilauro,
T. Gleisner, R. Sitch,
*Molvanîa: A Land
Untouched by Modern
Dentistry*, Overlook Press,
New York 2003

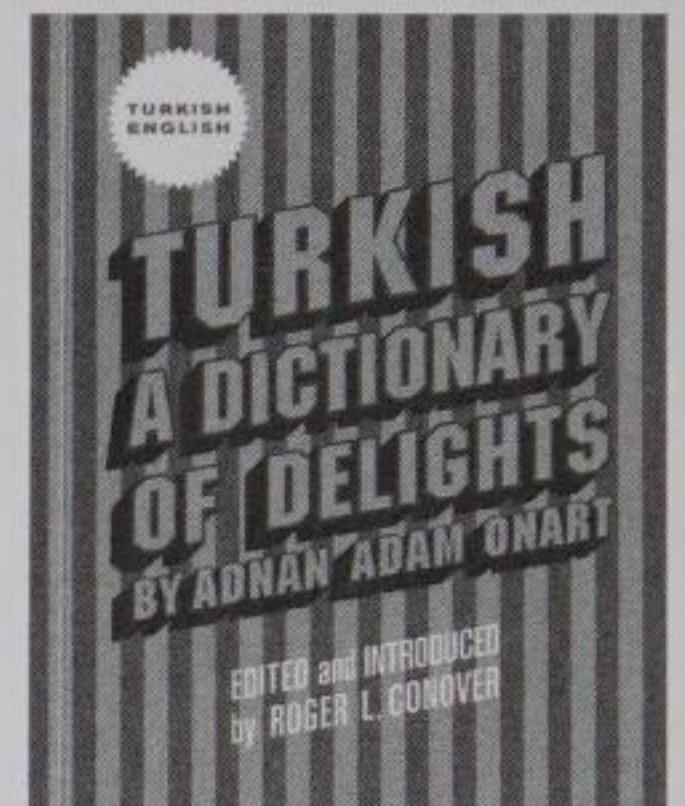
Editor (ed-i-tor), noun.

- 1 The author of his authors.
- 2 One who makes it possible for writers not to apologise for the impropriety of writing.
- 3 One who reads the spaces between books; one who composes space and time through the arrangement, assembly and interaction of sounds and images.

For a long time, invisible to the East, another ideology was spreading. Its name was happiness. Europeans had viewed happiness as an absence, but to Americans it was something else. 'Le bonheur n'a pas d'histoire' (happiness has no story), Balzac wrote, echoing Hegel's belief that 'periods of happiness are blank pages in history.' In the opening lines of *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy had spoken for Russia: 'All happy families resemble each other, each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.' After World War II, Americans made happiness the goal of civilisation, swallowing ideas like 'the pursuit of happiness' and the 'greatest happiness for the greatest number' like Valium. While the sounds of Stalinism quieted one populace, the sounds of happiness lulled another, until, like an anathematical reflex to feel-good propaganda, French philosophers and editors conspired to produce an antitoxin. The new substance, which became an addiction for American intellectuals, was a unique form of institutionalised unhappiness — critique. The French intelligentsia dominated production for most of the 1960s and 1970s until Americans started serving an academically-processed version — Theory.¹⁴

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the American academic system was able to absorb every bit of theory it produced. Then, without warning, as if the system suddenly developed an allergy to itself, it stopped selling. Publishers like MIT Press, Routledge, Minnesota and Verso had warehouses full of the stuff, and were on the verge of dumping it into the famous book-dissolving vats in New Jersey. Then someone pointed out that every provincial city in Eastern Europe was full of hyper-literates being offered only one line of books from the West: Taschen's sex/photography collection. 'Why don't you ship your theory East?', Jzacol Dirj asked me on my first trip to Lutenblag. 'We read the books of Western writers not because of what they teach us, but because we cannot bear to listen to our own stories anymore.'

With our stories we only continue to hurt each other, and ourselves. We can't yet write about the subjective space of communism with detachment because we are still too damaged by the knowledge of the dream that was lost. With your books, we can at least observe ourselves as foreigners, and imagine how some kind of translation process begins. We know your texts are not our destinies. But our own discourse will only emerge when we can no longer stand to hear ourselves spoken through your voices. The voice moves around the world like the wind, looking for a place to enter. For now, we listen to Western words to understand how much has not been understood, and to keep ourselves to ourselves. We make promiscuous use of your theory not because we are in love with it, but to remain voyeurs. Your theory is our pornography. Your theory allows us to keep our own words virginal until someone pays us, like they pay you, to spread them around.¹⁵



14. Unsigned editorial (M. Grief et al.), 'The Intellectual Situation', in *n+1*, n°2, Spring 2005

15. J. Dirj, *Theory Fever*, Lingvo Molvaneshte, Lutenblag 2005

Today, the once-dominant stacks of Taschen books in Lutenblag's bookstores have been overtaken by Semiotext(e), Verso and Zone Books. The children of those who were once imprisoned for reading books from the West now read them to find escape.

P

All that we loved is lost — we are in a desert, faced with a black square on a white ground!

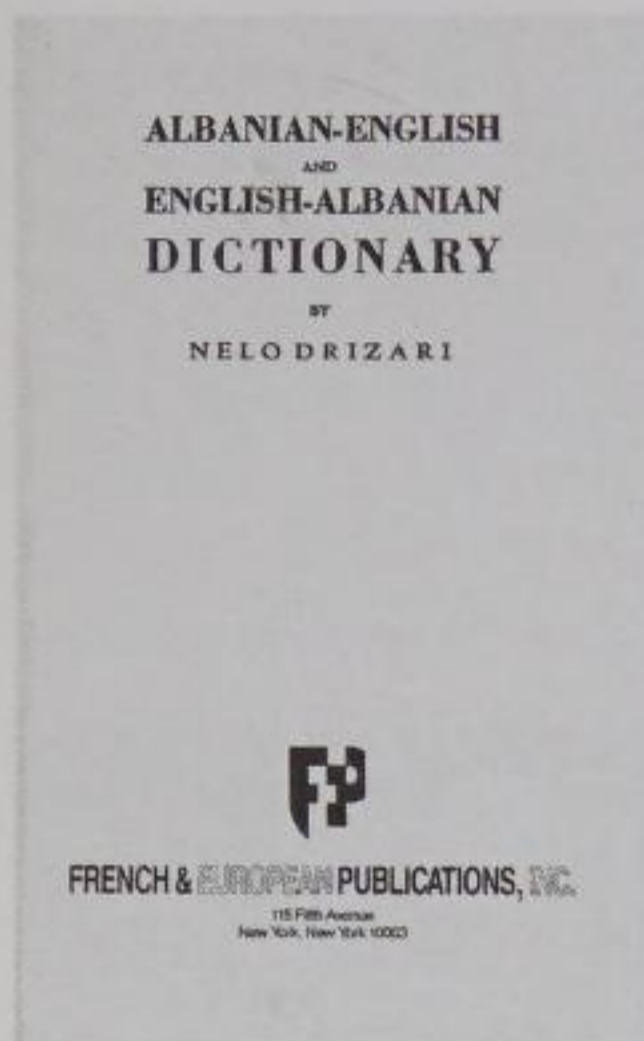
So declared Kasimir Malevich in 1913, describing public reaction to the geometric figure he posed as art. Eighty years later, when the system that posed as communism was broken, the Ljubljana-based IRWIN group went to Moscow to transform the words of Malevich into a public action. On 6 June 1992, the central part of Red Square was covered by 500 square metres of black fabric, displacing for thirty minutes fifty years of Soviet memory. Like a performance taking place on a giant wrestling mat, Time was trumped by Space, ideology pinned by art. The desert of the square became a place of possibility again. A place for the imagination to enter.

Q

If the great obsession of the nineteenth century was history, with its themes of monumentality and catastrophe, and the fixation of the last century was time, pointing forward, towards tomorrow, the century we now inhabit is the century of Space. We live between places, between meanings, between values. Our language turns away from the temporal prefixes, *post* and *neo*, towards the spatial signifiers, *inter* and *trans*. *Inter*: between or among things, as in interstice, a space that intervenes between things; or *interpret*, a negotiation between meanings. *Trans*, on the other hand, indicates across, over, beyond, through, as in transvestite (cross dresser), translate (carry across) or *Transnacionala* (across the nation).¹⁶ *Trans* also refers to the geometric configuration of two mutant genes (a/b) across from each other (East/West) on a pair of homologous chromosomes (Ab/aB), giving rise to alternative traits, such as (in biology) Neotenia.

By analogy, we could say that the developing art market of the East and the decaying art system of the West are connected like neotenic elements of the same animal. Two byproducts of a propaganda infrastructure known as the Cold War which both sides lost because of the failure of each to redesign its public — to successfully adapt. Even now, one public is drawn to television and computer screens like moths to flames, oblivious to the dangers of uncritical consumption, while the other is unable to read anything uncritically — overlaying even sex with theory. One absorbs everything innocently, the other reads everything, including innocence, cynically.

16. *Transnacionala*, in this context, refers to the physical and cultural journey carried out as a conceptual art project by a group of Slovenian and Russian artists in 1996 with the aim of rediscovering America and reintroducing the East to the West after the fall of communism. For a full account of this project see E. Čufer (ed.), *Transnacionala: Highway Collisions Between East and West at the Crossroads of Art*, Koda, Ljubljana 1999



R

For the young people of Neotenia, there will come a time when the old systems will be impossible to remember. Like communism, America will be an idea that passed through the region like a massive weather front, one that lasted more than two centuries, for most of that time casting happiness everywhere like the wind. Then the climate changed. Air became dead. In the early years of the third millennium, an idea briefly circulated that what happened to the Soviet Union could also happen to America. The idea did not last.

S

In what was once America, people live in a land littered with whirling souls, their leaders deranged and their artists anxious. Unsure of their senses, unable to think through metaphors, and frustrated by the fact that they exported all that they once produced, the people are jealous of the fact that the East is so much richer in the things the West once produced, from language to love to intelligence. Eastern visitors, crossing the wall that divides one America from another, wonder why it is that the people keep to themselves, why they so distrust, and what dialect they use among themselves. A young artist warily approaches a Russian professor when he hears him reading the words of Malevich. The words sound different now than they once did. So much has changed with time and translation. So much that was hopeful now sounds like despair.

‘How did your blackness become ours?’ the young artist asks, ‘how did we become you?’

‘The danger was not that what happened to the Soviet Union could one day happen to America,’ the professor answered. ‘The danger was that America believed it couldn’t.’

All that we loved is lost — we are in a desert, faced with a black square on a white ground!



Enjoy Me, Abuse Me, I am Your Artist: Cultural Politics, Their Monuments, Their Ruins Eda Čufer

Every force evolves a form, he thought. Sea and wind had shaped the ship. Shape answers use. And then use modifies the shape. Gulls flew just behind the aft deck, crying 'Tatlin! Tatlin!'
— Guy Davenport, 'Tatlin!'

Disposition

If communism stood behind the narrative of the twentieth century, behind the narrative of the twenty-first century stands its ruin. How, then, should we attempt a new reading of the history of the twentieth century? How will a new politics be articulated — not only on the axes of East and West but also of North and South? How, in the rotation of perspectives, will the perspective of the post-communist East be included?

Throughout modernity the West and East have been linked.¹ Linked not only through the imaginary of revolution and the historical avant-gardes, but also through a largely unacknowledged and intricate set of co-dependencies and compensations. What happened to one affected the other, not always in the sense of a diagrammable dialectic, but often in terms of a sublimated desire or accelerated dysfunction. For the East, the experience of communism was an experience grounded in reality. It was not an intellectual exercise or ideological flirtation, but a real engagement with a system that promised to solve the major conflicts and controversies of modern society. On the other hand there is no denying that the East's experiment appeared glamorous to the West. Its external appearance functioned as a mirror in which the West perfected its own image and admired itself as a 'work in progress', where for the best part of a century the solutions and responses relating to the enigma of modernity could be constructed, modelled, rehearsed and judged. The East, meanwhile, saw its image reflected nowhere outside of the borders of its own social experiment. As Andrei Codrescu has observed, the year 1989 did not bring about the immediate inner transformation of either the historical or the psychological profile of the East formed during the communist era.² What did change was the West's access to this imaginary communist East. The removal of the 'wall of shame', as Bruno Latour has referred to the Berlin Wall, made it possible for this territory to be inundated by a river of goods.³ Beginning in 1989, the integrated universal world economy which had developed during the Cold War period underwent an expansion of explosive proportions and began operating transnationally across state borders previously resistant to Western market influences.⁴ It took less than fifteen years for the operating conditions and principles of this new stage of globalisation, this new world order, to be established. During

1. In this essay, I use the terms 'West' and 'East' as they were defined by the geopolitics of the Cold War, namely, as Western Europe and the United States of America, on the one hand, and Eastern Europe and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, on the other hand.

2. A. Codrescu, *The Disappearance of the Outside*, Addison-Wesley, Boston 1990

3. B. Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1993

this time, the Western model of liberal capitalism assumed a new reproductive logic, warping the concepts and values of the former territorial West into a spider's web of economic transterritoriality. The West of Cold War times became as much a historical phantom as the former communist East.

The idea of a de-territorialised West which, like an empire, is re-territorialising itself within the global framework is a frequent motif of contemporary critical discourse. Globalisation, nationalism and ethnocentrism are not mutually exclusive concepts. Each of them is capable of suppressing class conflict, the prevailing motif of the previous century, in the name of some fictive pre-(post-)modern unity (global, national or ethnic).⁵ The collapse of former multinational states into national and ethnic communities and the regression of already secularised communities into networks of religious fundamentalism are among the means by which the new 'empire' can reorganise its resources. Many have been forced to take a step backwards in order to achieve a promised leap forwards, as globalisation, the ultimate 'dispositive of power' shapes the new century.⁶ Even as attempts to control globalisation seem to come from all possible directions, globalisation operates as a blind force, unpredictable and beyond regulatory order. Regardless of geography or stance, the question that must be addressed is how to use this force — how to 'reorient' it towards some constructive goal, how to turn its abstract universalism, even its transcendentalism, towards particular problems — thereby grounding it in concrete positions, concrete struggles. 'Reorientation', Susan Buck-Morss suggests, is the name for 'revolution' in the twenty-first century.⁷

As part of the integrated universal world economy, the neo-liberal art system also evolved during the Cold War period into one of the key functional systems of the dispositive of power in the Western democracies. This art system, while imperfect, nevertheless became the only one that could provide material and logistical support for the formation of a global culture — the critical culture that accompanies economic and political 'development'. This is not a culture that reveals the virtues or praises the unity of the global order; rather, it points to the differences, inequalities and internal conflicts that arise as a result of economic and technological development and the politics of the powerful. A discourse that would enable a truly constructive response to the controversies surrounding the neo-liberal global capitalism and its art system is still in the process of formation. The existing critical methodologies are no longer sufficient to address, or capable of articulating, the complexities of emerging relations within the new cultural realms and political stratifications — between the dissolving, restructuring centre and the growing number of active, expansive peripheries. As non-Western cultural spaces and subjectivities are assimilated under the wing of systems (economic, technological, cultural) that clearly speak in the idiom of Western hegemony, the need for a tactics of 'reorientation' (articulating new languages and positions that challenge the syntax of the dominant idiom) becomes acute. Tactics, in other words, that probe the new conditions from thoughtful angles and pose questions derived from constructive intellectual formulations rather than defensive postures. It is important to acknowledge that after all, non-Westerners are not the only ones who have been experiencing post-1989 shocks and transition traumas. The neo-liberal art system, formed within the parameters of the intellectual and political climate of the Cold War, was once a transparent concept, judging itself according to the complacent and self-satisfied premise that art was somehow equated with individual freedom, that it was an 'autonomous zone' where the wounds and pleasures of alienation could be mediated into enlightened forms of modern subjectivity. As long as art was the

4. In the *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991*, Abacus, London 1995, Eric Hobsbawm locates the formation of the integrated world economy between the years 1943 and 1973.

5. Dušan Bjelić, 'Global Aesthetic and the Serbian Cinema', in I. Imre (ed.), *East European Cinema*, Routledge, New York 2005

6. Michel Foucault defines the term 'dispositive of power' as 'a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourse, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions.' M. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, Pantheon, New York 1980

7. S. Buck-Morss, 'Visual Studies and Global Imagination,' *Papers of Surrealism*, n°2, Summer 2004, p.2 (online journal with downloadable pdf files, www.surrealismcentre.ac.uk/publications/papers/journal2, retrieved 12 June 2005)

highly desired product and exclusive property of Western culture, it could be viewed as a necessity, even if the primary function it performed was ensuring the survival of one's own system of belief. But when different notions of art started getting through the Western filters, forcing a critical re-examination of the legitimacy of long held convictions and institutionalised narratives — when the stories coming in from the tributaries started shifting the whole direction and flow of art thinking — this proved frustrating for individuals shaped by laboratory cultural experiences. Many influential intellectual and artistic circles in the West still defend the principles of modernism and the Western avant-gardes established during the Cold War without ever having systematically analysed the actual historical conditions under which the dominant art paradigm was produced and practiced in the last century. When nostalgic, academic leftism is applied to the realms of new political and cultural stratifications, the results are no less regressive and pathetic than defensive nationalism or ethnocentrism.

In order to set out a concrete position — one that will itself be in need of reorientation — let us attempt to examine the reasons behind the absence of a synthesized historical narrative about the development of the content, forms and contexts of the cultural and artistic production that took place under communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union between 1930 and 1989, that is, from the rise of Stalinism in the Soviet Union to the fall of the Berlin Wall. The persisting cultural amnesia of the East with regard to the period of communism points both to the powerlessness of post-communist countries to democratize themselves through their own historical, intellectual and creative resources, as well as to the exclusive and ideological character of the historical narrative and discourses of the Western conception of modernism and the avant-garde movements — discourses that evolved for the most part in the second half of the twentieth century, parallel with the formation of the neo-liberal art system.

Situation: West

Peter Bürger, in *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, makes a crucial distinction between modernism and the avant-garde movements. He points to a fundamental difference in their respective strategies for negating the basic operative principles of bourgeois society, that is to say, the dominant forms of reception that came about as a consequence of the development of the cultural industry and the commercialisation of culture.⁸ While modernism may be understood in this process as a strategy of deviation from linguistic norms and clichés, as an assault on traditional techniques of writing and painting and a subversion of linguistic norms and structures, avant-garde strategies are something altogether different. They can be understood only as a total assault on the social order, having as their goal the complete transformation of the spaces of organisation. This would include the institutionalised art market and the conditions under which art is produced and distributed in modern industrial society. Whereas modernism can be understood to have developed within the framework of liberalism, the avant-garde movements operated on the basis of a utopian political imaginary. In their concrete socio-political interventions, they even flirted quite openly with totalitarian political options. The legitimising discourses that functionalised modernism and avant-gardism as the dominant models of Western culture during the time of post-war democratic capitalism developed primarily in the 1930s and 1940s, when it was still not clear what the outcome would be in the three-way struggle for political hegemony between National Socialism/fascism, communism and liberal capitalism. For the first half of the twentieth century, let us remember,

8. P. Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1984

there was no retrospective certainty that communism or fascism would not prevail. It was precisely the debate between ideologies and value systems during a time when all possibilities were still on the table that made American critical culture matter.

In *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*, Serge Guilbaut provides a detailed analysis of the origin of the discursive formation that was generated within American intellectual and artistic circles in the 1930s and 1940s, parallel with the rise and fall of National Socialism in Germany and fascism in Italy and the ascendancy of Stalinism in the Soviet Union.⁹ Guilbaut's research, which focuses primarily on the critical debates aired in specialised literary and art journals, rescues a short but essential episode in the mythology of modern art. By reminding us of the political, cultural and economic debates that gave shape to and defined the operation of the intellectual public sphere at precisely the time that America's political and economic Cold War doctrine was being constructed, he reveals how the discourses, institutions and professional networks that defined the criteria of art made art such a powerful tool in the post-war political climate of the West.

According to Buck-Morss, the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 presented, from the very beginning, an absolute threat to the Western political imaginary.¹⁰ Operating transterritorially, through the imagination, it inflamed ideas that rang out as a summons to individuals and masses across the entire world. While the West could at any moment prevent the expansion of the Bolshevik army, it could not prevent the expansion of Bolshevism itself, or rather, of all those heterogeneous ideas that sought their meaning in the concept of the October Revolution. This concept not only activated various social classes and segments of the intelligentsia (scientific, artistic, philosophical); it also operated as a generator of the content and forms of the twentieth century. For that class which held control over politics and economic resources in the West, the primary question of course was how to prevent the virus of revolution from developing enough critical mass to demand change and a redefinition of the principles of property, as had happened in Russia.

The international distribution of twentieth-century Western scientific, political and cultural potential gave rise to the imaginary of the 'internal enemy', an enemy which characterised the homogenizing strategy of all three of the dominant ideologies of the last century. The Nazis saw their greatest internal enemy as the Jews, the communists identified the enemy in bourgeois and anti-communist 'elements', while the capitalists saw their internal enemy in the communist 'elements' operating in their territories. Conservative political and cultural circles in America, as in Nazi Germany, perceived in modern art the virus of communism. For the actual communists, however, modern art was the product of the cultural decadence of the Western bourgeoisie.

As Nazism and Stalinism were consolidating their power in Europe in the 1930s, America was trying to recover from the stock market disaster of 1929. (It is no coincidence that the Museum of Modern Art was founded in the same year that Wall Street trembled.) In the years that followed, there existed in America a massive proletarian movement and a search for the cultural expressions and art forms to legitimise Marxist values. As improbable as it seems today, communism was at that time still vying to become the 'Americanism' of the twentieth century. Writers, actors and painters played significant roles in the workers' movement guided by the Popular Front and engaged in critical debates about how to integrate social commentary and leftist content into modern literature and painting. In the American debates of the 1930s, the left sharply condemned the attempts of right-wing groups to develop an American national literature and painting. But the unity of the

9. S. Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1983

10. S. Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West*, MIT Press, Cambridge 2000

American left was threatened when the conflict between Trotsky and Stalin forced sympathisers to choose sides. While the American Communist Party continued to support Stalinist Russia, most American intellectuals, after hearing reports about the Moscow Trials of 1936, tended to follow a Trotskyist line. There began to be public debates about how literature and painting could preserve their revolutionary character without, at the same time, having to renounce the achievements and experimental nature of modernism. The cultural press was full of articles attacking vulgar, mechanical Marxism and the cultural policy of Stalinism, while the crucial debate over modern abstract art continued within the context of Trotskyism. In contrast to MOMA founder and first director Alfred H. Barr, Jr., who saw abstract art as divorced from social reality and grounded in its own internal formal rules, the influential Marxist art historian Meyer Schapiro asserted that every form of art, even the most abstract, was grounded in social reality and in the conditions under which it was produced. Although Schapiro was critical of abstract artists for living with the illusion of independence from social reality, he nevertheless opened up new possibilities for an interpretation of abstract art by imbuing it with an even loftier meaning than the formalists themselves had given it.

From the second half of the 1930s up to America's intervention in World War II at the beginning of the 1940s, there was, according to Guilbaut, a massive turning away from realistic and propagandist painting (on the part of artists on both the left and the right) in favour of modernist and abstract formal investigation. From 1939 onwards, one can detect in the magazines of the American intelligentsia the crystallization of new interpretations and discourses that evidenced the de-Marxification and de-politicisation of the anti-Stalinist left. From today's perspective, we know that Clement Greenberg's 1939 essay 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch' had a momentous influence on the understanding and development of modern art in the second half of the twentieth century.¹¹ But in its own time, it was just as important for what it did to ideologically sharpen the terms and stakes of the then-prevailing cultural wars. Greenberg managed to reactivate an old opposition, namely, the opposition between the avant-garde and modernism as a dynamic and vital process on the one hand and a static, mechanically reproduced academicism, or kitsch, on the other — the language of mass culture. Greenberg observed that the masses were more or less uninterested in the development of a dynamic culture:

Such culture is being abandoned by those to whom it actually belongs — our ruling class. For it is to the latter that the avant-garde belongs. No culture can develop without a social basis, without a source of stable income. And in the case of the avant-garde, this was provided by an élite among the ruling class of that society from which it assumed itself to be cut off, but to which it has always remained attached by an umbilical cord of gold. The paradox is real.¹²

Thus, Greenberg shifted the debate from general political and cultural discourse to the discourse of cultural politics. By identifying the ideological split that lay at the very heart of the concept of culture in industrial society, he neutralised the significance of the political polarisation between right and left. Taking a stance against mass culture and for élite culture in a way that was itself ideological, he eliminated the solutions proposed by the cultural policies of actual communism and Nazism (which in 1939, when the essay was written, had just entered into a brief alliance with each other under the terms of a pact signed between Hitler and Stalin).

11. Greenberg's essay was first published in *The Partisan Review* 6, n°5, 1939

12. C. Greenberg, 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch', in *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, Vol. 1, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 1986, pp.10-11

Greenberg wrote:

Where today a political regime establishes an official cultural policy, it is for the sake of demagogy. If kitsch is the official tendency of culture in Germany, Italy and Russia, it is not because their respective governments are controlled by philistines, but because kitsch is the culture of the masses in these countries, as it is everywhere else.¹³

The linking of kitsch with totalitarian power was compelling for many in the West who still believed in the project of the left. The negation of mass culture on an artistic level, through a formal language, became a new weapon — a means by which the artist, with his exclusive and élite expressive capacities, could fight against degraded political structures.

So what began in the second half of the 1930s as a process of de-Marxifying the American intelligentsia became an ideology of total de-politicization after World War II. By that time, two clear alternatives had emerged: Truman's America was one choice. Stalin's Soviet Union was the other. This impossible choice caused many leftist intellectuals to withdraw from public debate altogether, while others were motivated to search for a new political doctrine. This doctrine would eventually constitute itself as liberalism, but it was first insinuated in such acts as America's intervention into the war in Europe and in such books as Wendell Wilkie's meaningfully-titled *One World*, a popular seller which advocated the policy America was to follow — turning quietly away from isolationism to adopt an almost utopian internationalism.¹⁴

Ultimately, it was a peculiarly American form of art that became America's most effective foreign policy tool. Enthroned by Clement Greenberg and the new American formalist critics in the 1940s as the updated, American version of the European modern art tradition, there developed around this style an extensive array of interests, coming not only from the art market but also from American foreign policy-makers. Despite the conviction of some of its representatives that it would be 'disastrous to name ourselves',¹⁵ the movement took on a name, and it was one that would stick. Indeed, the phrase 'abstract expressionism' used to be heard as much in the chambers of Cold War planners as the classrooms of art historians.

Four decades later, the art world was dismayed by what had once been common knowledge among policy experts, when articles by Max Kozloff, Eva Cockcroft and others postulated a political alliance between abstract expressionism and the American neo-liberal political doctrine of the Cold War.¹⁶ These stories suggested links between private corporate capital, the Museum of Modern Art and representatives of the Central Intelligence Agency who, bypassing official democratic procedures and congressional authorisation, had apparently devised strategies for the large-scale exportation of American culture to Europe and throughout the world — initially, abstract expressionism, then later, examples of all the new, radical and avant-garde cultural trends of the 1950s and 1960s. The connection between American Cold War rhetoric and the manner in which abstract expressionist artists set out their existential and individualistic credo was developed by the movement's most influential members, who, according to Cockcroft, controlled museum policies and advocated an enlightened Cold War tactic tailored to the taste of European intellectuals. In Guilbaut's assessment, by 1949 traditional democratic liberalism was already a thing of the past. In its place, a hard-boiled anti-communism began to permeate the American political spectrum. Left-leaning editors of magazines and journals, as well as like-minded others in a position to shape public opinion, were quietly removed from

13. *Ibid.*, p. 20

14. S. Guilbaut, *op. cit.*

15. A frequently quoted comment attributed to Willem de Kooning.

16. E. Cockcroft, 'Abstract Expressionism. Weapon of the Cold War', in F. Frascina (ed.), *Pollock and After*, Harper & Row Publishers, Icon Editions, New York 1985

influential positions. The neo-liberal ideology — whose manifesto was presented in Arthur Schlesinger's book *The Vital Center* — found no difficulty in adopting an American approach to avant-garde logic, which, after all, propagated the values of individual risk-taking and unrestrained, indomitable energy.¹⁷ As an essential factor in achieving individual freedom, risk-taking was precisely what totalitarian regimes were supposedly trying to nip in the bud. In Schlesinger's ideological reformulation, a victorious liberalism stood behind an unconditional anti-communism, and established itself as the dominant voice of American politics precisely through the way it instrumentalised the ideal of individual freedom.¹⁸

This fact — that America's Cold War cultural policies were initially established as a project of the cultural and professional élite, operating outside of the state's official decision-making process and its democratically elected bodies — should not be forgotten. Not only can America's first Cold War cultural practices be read as the early draft of what later became explicit government practice, but lines can be drawn between these times and those. At the end of the 1940s and in the first half of the 1950s, a multitude of cultural connections were being established between America, 'both Europes', and the rest of the world — in the form of art exhibitions, dance tours, film screenings and theatre projects — which met with an ever more positive response abroad. This enthusiasm served to confirm the success of the unofficial cultural policy. It was not only abstract expressionism that proved itself an effective cultural signalling device, but radical forms of music, dance and other productions. Finally, in 1954, President Dwight D. Eisenhower decided to legitimise the policy by asking Congress to fund the President's Emergency Fund for International Affairs.¹⁹ The system for deciding who would represent America abroad adhered to a principle of absolute transparency. The task was entrusted to the American National Theater and Academy (ANTA), which created expert committees made up of informed, progressive critics and intellectuals. Without any interference from politicians, they decided what examples of American culture should be exported, and that meant finding the newest, most radical and experimental artists. Not only the New York City Ballet, not only John Cage, but also Merce Cunningham, the entire generation of Judson Memorial Church artists, minimalists, conceptualists, etc. were sent abroad as part of America's Cold War art front. The ANTA system eventually evolved into the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). Established in 1965, the NEA still remains the official funding branch of the US government for financing American culture.

Situation: East

While we might criticise the narrative and theory of Western art history as being a unique construct of Cold War cultural policy, that construct could not operate as it did unless it mobilised within the framework of its co-ordinates actual critical, intellectual and creative forms of enjoyment, forms which described and shaped the experience and horizons of the twentieth century.

Critical theory is an integral part of the Western art system. This system is preserved and revitalised through its own criticism. However, modern art and intellectual production in the East during the time of communism was neither *enjoyed* nor *abused*. That Eastern Europeans had been deprived of the legitimate enjoyment of being modern was a consequence of the inability of the communist cultural politic to invent a functional use for modern and avant-garde art and culture within the context of its own social political experiment. What attempted to compensate for the usurpation and eradication of modern art was a genuine cultural-political construct that could function only by mobilising repression.

17. A. M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom*, Riverside Press, Boston 1962 (originally published in 1949)

18. S. Guilbaut, *op. cit.*

19. N. Prevots, *Dance for Export: Cultural Diplomacy and the Cold War*, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown 1998

During the Cold War race, the Eastern states could successfully compete with the West in scientific and technical disciplines, where success could be measured by instruments and where quality was not reducible to the execution of interpretation. One only has to look at the superior space technology, superb physical culture and sports champions, advanced medicine, well developed health, energy and educational systems, and other examples of technological and scientific prowess to be reminded of the legendary accomplishments made by Eastern Bloc countries in these realms during the Cold War. In the realm of philosophy, theory and arts, it is another story altogether. Here the institutions and production systems of the East did not recognise genius or skill produced within the East's own political borders. This phenomenon is both a cause and an effect of the brain drain of Eastern humanistic intelligentsia to the West; this fact has been well-documented and acknowledged; but what is far less understood, less tangible, and more damaging was a parallel phenomenon. I am referring to the inner brain drain by which creative expression was prevented and critical articulation discouraged on the part of those who stayed.

The German sociologist Claus Offe has analysed 'scientific socialism' as the official political theory of the socialist countries — a system of interpretation explaining why and how things should be understood, measured and valued in the communist society —, the purpose of which was to translate Marxist philosophy into real social practice by inventing the language and ideological formulae that could be spoken and repeated with equal fluency by workers in the factory, teachers in the classroom, journalists in the newspaper, writers in books, painters on canvas, and sociologists or philosophers developing ideas for the scientific institutions for whom they worked.²⁰ This theory, concludes Offe, was founded on the immense pathos of a system planning its own structures and transformations, as well as on the need for maintaining all social life within the framework of an imaginary entity that would be entirely subject to control. The use of language, the proscribed interpretation of reality, was one of the most powerful means of exercising this control — a control which took place directly through the psyches of the people by telling them what to believe and how to speak — and not to speak what they believed. Paradoxically, however, or rather as a logical consequence, Offe observes, socialism did not, as a rule, develop reliable methods for controlling what was actually happening in society. In contrast to socialism, the liberal democracies developed effective control techniques through their support of research and analysis even in the most distant corners and crevices. The socialist regimes were not even able to develop a rational estimation of their capital resources and thus could not calculate their production efficiency. Mainly, however, the socialist regimes did not cultivate the artistic, scientific and political criticality that would have allowed them to articulate and reflect how society was being perceived by its own members.

The validation and interpretation of reality during the time of communism is the ultimate political complexity of the Eastern post-communist societies. To look at this issue is to consider how state institutions functioned before and after communism, what these institutions produced, whom they served, and to what extent the institutions and social bodies of the socialist modern state resemble those of modern democratic states. Indeed, the East has museums, universities, institutes, and academies that, like its Western counterparts, produce history, statistics, theory and other discourses. The question is not one of productivity, but credibility: to what extent can we trust and believe in the narratives they produced? If for Western individuals these institutions represent some kind of prosthetic bodies through which they can extend and fully realise their creative, political or scientific visions

20. C. Offe, *Varieties of Transition: The East European and East German Experience*, MIT Press, Cambridge 1997

and potentials, if for them the institutions are supposed to function as bridges through which individual values become collectivised, and if the history of the institution presents a kind of sum of individual efforts, then for the Easterners, institutions still represent a zone of fear, a source of punishment and frustration, a place where original, subjective inputs get somehow deformed, damned, perverted. Easterners deeply mistrust if not hate their public institutions because those institutions conditioned them to be submissive. On the other hand, paradoxically, it is exactly this hatred that reproduces submissiveness. Constructive critique cannot be born from hatred of the object of criticism, only from the desire to constructively modify it. Although the Communist Party was removed from its central position in the Eastern European countries quite some time ago, and the language of 'scientific socialism' supposedly survives only in comic strip underground cultures, the dysfunctional, neurotic institutional culture of the East is not so easy to eradicate — its survival perpetuated largely by the memory of fear it instilled. One still finds it wherever one finds bureaucratic systems or authoritarian models discouraging ideas, pleasure or trust — and this can be in museums and academies as easily as in hotels or banks. For this reason Eastern Europe becomes not only a passive receiver of neo-liberal economic plans and scenarios but also a submissive recipient of western theory and other contemporary narratives of diverse value which warrant more differentiation and selection than they receive. Eastern intellectuals and academics cannot help but feel powerful when asked to reproduce some original discourse from western theory and cultural history, especially when compared to the dysfunctionality and vulnerability they feel when asked to repeat the neurotic formations and unreflected stories that pass as the 'official' Cold War versions of culture in Eastern Europe. The fact is that neither discursive formation is entirely appropriate, and a third narrative still needs to be found ... this is the crack in the discursive façade of the East that needs to be explored, not necessarily for gold, but for a moral force that the East needs to regain as its own.

For all the reasons Cold War cultural policy of the East cannot be as clearly reconstructed as that of the West, we will nonetheless attempt to extract some meaning from the East's cultural amnesia and discursive neurosis with respect to its own history from the rise of Stalinism to the fall of communism (1930–89).

In the ecstatic, transitional years immediately following the 1917 revolution in Russia, as in the heady, hopeful years of New Deal America, a struggle for cultural identity unfolded as various cultural groups and artistic movements vied with each other to provide the best interpretation and embodiment of what was supposed to be the *sublime* ideal of modern revolutionary culture. As Buck-Morss has written, there was massive support for the events of October 1917, but this support was not of one mind.²¹ Utopian dreamers of all types were eager to interpret the revolutionary future as the one they envisaged. Alongside the various avant-garde circles there was also, for example, the Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russia, an umbrella organisation of easel painters founded in 1922 as a reaction to the avant-garde attack on representational art. Proletarian cultural organisations, which in 1917 were centralised in Proletkult, were financed at the local and factory levels in conjunction with workers' organisations. Funding decisions in Proletkult were made independently of the state and the party. Anatoly v. Lunacharsky, who was responsible for cultural affairs at the party level, focused his cultural policy on the importance of political engagement rather than on any one dominant artistic style. He supported all kinds of artists' groups and encouraged them to compete with each other in demonstrating revolutionary authenticity. While the Russian avant-garde

21. S. Buck-Morss, *op. cit.*

had existed as an art movement before the revolution, it was only after 1917 that it received official recognition and financial support. The coexistence, even codependence of the Russian avant-garde with more traditional modern and academic groups reveals the complexity of Soviet cultural history before the advent of Stalinism, which Boris Groys has analysed in his book *Gesamtkunstwerk Stalin*.²² By connecting the birth of Stalinist culture to the spirit of the avant-garde, Groys exposes a deep controversy between art and society in the age of modernity.

As already mentioned, this is the paradox that also occupies Peter Bürger. In his formulation, the avant-garde movements differed from modernism by calling for a total change in the social conditions in which art is produced, not just a revolution in the understanding of the formal principles of the artwork. It was the avant-garde movements that took the greatest risk in erasing the distinctions between the political and cultural definition of revolution. If we examine avant-garde theories, praxis, and manifestoes carefully, says Groys, we cannot deny the fact that a connection was made between, on the one hand, the artistic will for controlling and organising material in accordance with the artist's own principles and, on the other, the political will for power. The fact that Western art history has acknowledged avant-garde artists to the point that museums gladly accept their work is, Groys asserts, not a victory for the artist but rather a form of reparation from the victorious democratic state. In this sense, Groys provocatively concludes, the art of socialist realism (and Nazi art, as well) achieved a position that the avant-garde had sought from the very beginning, that is, a position that placed it beyond the museum, beyond art history, making it absolutely other in relation to any and all cultural norms. The discrepancy between the avant-garde's and the Party's interpretations of the revolution became apparent quite early, around 1919. Buck-Morss locates this discrepancy in a 'politics of conflicting temporalities'. If an artist chose to accept the cosmological concept of time as constructed by the party through its propagandist imaginary, this meant glorifying the party and concealing all of its failures, which began to accumulate once it started trying to carry out its concrete social projects and plans. The visions of avant-garde artists soon began to diverge drastically from the difficult and dirty reality, and, in the post-revolutionary climate, began to resemble bourgeois European modernism. In its struggle to win a place in the historical continuum of art, Buck-Morss argues, the avant-garde lost its credibility as a concrete revolutionary strategy. Groys concludes that Stalin's cultural policies, which should be studied as an integral part of twentieth-century cultural history, fulfilled an inherent demand of the avant-garde movements, namely, to move from the presentation of reality to its transformation. In this way, Stalinist policy crossed a line that avant-garde artists themselves did not dare cross. By the mid-1920s, suprematism and futurism were already being regarded as passé. Any art that did not develop in the direction outlined by the Party was considered to be historically regressive, bourgeois and counter-revolutionary. The key moment in the temporal unscrolling and establishment of the Party's cosmological time, which was beginning to supplant all other temporalities, was the death of Lenin in 1924. Time stopped with Lenin's death. The committee responsible for arranging Lenin's funeral authorised the mummification and preservation of his body for all time. Artists were invited to collaborate on the design of the corpse's house — the sarcophagus and mausoleum. Tatlin believed that the mausoleum should be a triumph of engineering, while Malevich suggested, on the very day of Lenin's death, that his grave should take the form of a cube:

22. B. Groys, *Gesamtkunstwerk Stalin: Die gespaltene Kultur in der Sowjetunion*, Carl Hanser Verlag, Munich 1988

The cube is no longer a geometric body. It is a new object with which we try to portray eternity, to create a new set of circumstances, with which we can maintain Lenin's eternal life, defeating death.²³

Although neither Tatlin nor Malevich ended up designing the public mortality structure in which Lenin's body now rests, on view for all to see, this building continues to symbolise even today the demonic, impossible bond between revolution and the avant-garde. When in 1992, the IRWIN group, as part of the project *NSK Embassy Moscow* realised the performance *Black Square on Red Square*, in which a square black cloth, forty metres by forty metres, was unfolded on Red Square in Moscow, the action provoked a certain discomfort among Russian artists. At first it seemed that this discomfort was due to territorial resentment (foreign artists were appropriating Russia's historical material as their own), but later it turned out that the reasons were linked to a deeper collective trauma.²⁴ In 1995, the Bulgarian theoretician Vladislav Todorov confronted the issue of the cultural meaning of Lenin's mausoleum and, in his analysis of the specifically Eastern scientific and theoretical utopian imaginary, illuminated a different, thrillingly transcendentalist face of modernity.²⁵ The sacralization of Lenin heralded a regression from the modern into a pre-(post-) modern pseudo-religious society in which the party defined (as the church had done previously) the relationship between signifier and signified, or rather, it closed the semiotic gulf and prevented the eruption of the pluralism of interpretations that characterise the modern, alienated, industrial and post-industrial society of the West.

The final shift to the cultural policy of Stalinism was formally announced in 1932 by a decree of the Central Committee of the Communist Party abolishing all artistic associations. From that point onwards, all Soviet artistic workers would be grouped according to their fields of operation into unified organisations such as the Union of Writers, the Union of Visual Artists, etc. The concurrent termination of the New Economic Policy meant that at the same time the market for artworks was also abolished. As a result, the newly centralised artistic groups were now all forced to work for a single patron: the state. As part of these measures, an officially prescribed artistic style was also formulated, namely socialist realism, which, contrary to Greenberg's assertion was not devised to suit the taste of the masses. The masses hated it. Socialist realism was itself a carefully designed construct of the Soviet party élite. This centralist, market-less model of cultural policy, which completely blocked the kind of cultural dynamics and temporal pluralism found in modern Western society was, after World War II, also applied to other Eastern Bloc countries. Despite the fact that the Soviet model was grafted in very different ways onto the very different cultural traditions of Eastern Europe, it was nonetheless true that even in the friendliest version of Eastern European communism — in Tito's Yugoslavia, which in 1948 renounced its allegiance to Stalin — socialism existed as a system in which the party placed itself above all state interventions and in which the official cultural professional organisations had monopolies in their fields and acted repressively towards any cultural practice that did not wish to submit to their hierarchies. Over time, the monopoly of the unions was not based so much on the idea of maintaining social realism as the one legitimate style, as on the principle of maintaining control over the definition of art. In countries like Poland, Czechoslovakia or Yugoslavia, Unions of Visual Artists tolerated or even propagated rigid versions of Greenbergian modernism while remaining intolerant of any approach to art other than the one they prescribed. Today, many official institutions in the East are still very proud of their collections of Eastern modern paintings, as if

23. N. Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives! The Lenin Cult in Soviet Russia*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1983, p. 190

24. For a more detailed discussion of this project and documentation of the reaction to it, see E. Čufer (ed.), *NSK Embassy Moscow: How the East Sees the East*, Loža Gallery, Koper and Obalne Galeije, Piran 1992

25. V. Todorov, *Red Square, Black Square: Organon for Revolutionary Imagination*, State University of New York Press, New York 1994

wanting to say: 'Look, we too were modern. Art during the communist period was not only social realism, but also about modernism, here as well as in the West.' Indeed this art was sometimes more fanatically Western than western art itself. The artist who submitted to the policy of the unions had work and was exhibited, while those who did not were abandoned and dropped into the void of historical amnesia. Just as we cannot fully equate the post-war cultural policies of Western European countries with those of America, so we cannot fully equate the cultural policies of Eastern European countries with the policy of the Soviet Union. Both Cold War superpowers were exporting to Europe (which was still trying to reconstitute itself after two World Wars) their own particular model of cultural production forged in the 1930s and 1940s. These two protagonists were the ones who created the political geometry that we still live with today — the idea of West-East as a line and a divide, as opposed to a continuum and a unity.

Tale of the (Two) Square(s)

In the Soviet Union of the 1930s, it was a mortal flaw for an artist to be a 'formalist'. Kasimir Malevich — the inventor of the 'square' — returned to geometrical figurative painting after 1928, a move that even today challenges interpreters of his work. On the other hand, formalism was, as we have already seen, the most valued criterion for political art in America in the late 1930s and 1940s. The stance of apolitical politicality became a weapon in the Cold War when non-representational art was equated with the democratic societies of the West, as opposed to the representational realism of totalitarian regimes (in this regard no difference was made between Nazism/fascism and communism). For this reason, according to Buck-Morss, it is truly revealing to observe the fate of the square as it moved through the complex political landscape of the twentieth century.²⁶ Of course, the square and abstract art were not the exclusive property of the Russian avant-garde. The Bauhaus, which was also prosecuted for practicing modern art (its closure was forced by the Nazis in 1933), also worked in this idiom, as did the Dutch De Stijl artists. But it was only in the internationalised environments of the West that the square managed to survive.

While the official fate of the square in the East in the 1930s was monumentalised in Red Square in Moscow, crucial debates around this image and its metamorphoses continued in the West right up to the time of conceptualism.²⁷ Benjamin Buchloh, in his essay 'Conceptual Art 1962–1969',²⁸ while analysing the genealogy of the square and the cube in 1960s American art, refers to the response of minimalist and conceptualist artists to the publication of the first comprehensive history of the Russian avant-garde, Camilla Gray's *The Great Experiment: Russian Art 1863–1922*, in 1962.²⁹ 'This question is of particular importance,' Buchloh writes, 'since many of the formal strategies of early conceptual art appear at first glance to be as close to the practices and procedures of the constructivist/productivist avant-garde as minimal sculpture had appeared to be dependent upon its materials and morphologies.' And while there have been some attempts since 1989 to establish a parallel between Western conceptualism and the concurrent conceptual practices in the East, such comparisons, in fact, do more to underscore the differences than to prove equivalence between the two phenomena. These differences will only become clearer as the distinct socio-political contexts in which these works were created and the different positions and manoeuvrability of the artists within the framework of their respective societies is better understood.

Western artists of the 1960s and 1970s, through the deconstruction of the formalist frameworks of modernism, were primarily concerned with the restrictive

26. S. Buck-Morss, *op. cit.*

27. The 'secret history' and the fate of the square in Eastern European art must still be explored and analysed.

28. B. H.D. Buchloh, 'Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions', *October* n°55, 1990, p.140

29. C. Gray, *The Great Experiment: Russian Art 1863–1922*, Thames & Hudson, London 1962. A new edition of this book, revised and enlarged by M. Burleigh-Motley, appeared in 1986 as *The Russian Experiment in Art, 1863–1922*, Thames & Hudson, London

and repressive features of the art system and the dominant role of the market, in the context of which — as Marcel Duchamp demonstrated at the beginning of the twentieth century — the question ‘What is art?’ becomes the object of legal definition and the consequence of institutional valuation. That which the artist produces is, as Duchamp posited, only a kind of raw material, ‘which must be “refined”, as pure sugar from molasses’, in the assessment of the public: ‘The artist may shout from all the rooftops that he is a genius: he will have to wait for the verdict of the spectator in order that his declarations take a social value and that, finally, posterity includes him in the primers of art history.’³⁰

If we accept Duchamp’s persuasive arguments, then how do we define — both within the post-communist countries of Eastern Europe and in the framework of neo-liberal capitalism — the cultural or market value of the Eastern European art practices that emerged in the period 1930–89? The cultural meaning of these practices could hardly be refined ‘as pure sugar from molasses’ by the verdict of the environment in which they developed; or rather, considering the conditions under which the verdict was developed, the work has been preserved in a state of rawness, which must again in today’s new context be socially refined and appraised.

In the late 1950s artistic and political undergrounds began to take shape in Eastern Europe, independently and disconnectedly from one another, but in response to similar conditions of repressive cultural politics of the communist state. These were the years in which the discourses of post-war Eastern art started to gradually develop outside of any state cultural policy and without the benefit of any ‘umbilical cord of gold’ connected to state or private sponsorship.³¹ It was during this same time that the West began to rediscover the Russian historical avant-garde. The euphoria over Russian historical avant-garde material was the result of several factors, of which the 1962 publication of Camilla Gray’s history was a key one, but not the only one. Also important were a number of studies published in English, French and Italian by other scholars, both from the Soviet Union and abroad, who during the Khrushchev era gained access to archives and previously banned sources on the basis of which they were able to make reliable historical reconstructions. But as these books and catalogues were printed in the West for the Western marketplace, artists from the Soviet Union remained in the dark about this part of their own cultural heritage. It was only in the 1970s and 1980s, as this narrative was filtered back into Soviet cultural space through the West, that Soviet artists and intellectuals could piece together this narrative for themselves.

The historical codification of the Russian avant-garde is, in a strange way, connected with the incandescent spirit of Western New Left intellectual and artistic trends as well as the student reform movements of the late 1960s. Art historian Eva Forgacs, in her essay ‘How the New Left Invented East-European Art’, argues that the concept of Eastern European art did not even exist until the 1960s, when it was first established through the gaze of the West. Artists from the countries of the communist East never actually identified themselves with the East, either in the period between the two World Wars or in the Cold War period.³² While it is possible, as Forgacs states, that political repression created a certain feeling of solidarity among artists who developed strategies of resistance against these regimes, the fact is that no lasting connections or exchanges could be established that would have permitted some sort of common discourse to evolve. In principle, communism did not have an international cultural policy within the framework of its political bloc, and if cultural exchanges did take place at the state level, we can be sure that those who were at odds with the logic of the regime took no part in them

30. M. Duchamp, *The Creative Act*, Sub Rosa, Brussels 2000, CD

31. These practices were described under various status labels in the countries of Eastern Europe: ‘unofficial’, ‘alternative’, ‘subcultural’, ‘underground’, etc.

32. Eva Forgacs, ‘How the New Left Invented East-European Art’, *Centropa* 3, n°2, May 2003

whatsoever. The West's rediscovery of and fascination with the Russian avant-garde also created an interest, in the art history of other Eastern Bloc countries. In the 1960s and 1970s, during the time that the contemporary art market was being constructed, cultural exchanges and international institutional infrastructure were being developed, and American cultural policies of the Cold War were being exported, numerous exhibitions and exchanges were organised with the East. The idealisation of the Russian avant-garde was embraced by the New Left, which was attempting to rethink the reasons behind the failure of the earlier leftist project in the West and to strategise possible ways of revitalising it. Combusting in the heat of this desire was the Situationist International, viewed by many commentators as the last ultra-left art movement which not only refused to surrender to the hegemony of the marketplace but insisted on analysing, to its last breath, the logic behind this hegemony. Nostalgia for revolution and social utopia was being expressed in American poststructuralist circles as well. When the first issue of *October*, a new American journal of art, theory, criticism and politics appeared in 1976, the editors explained that they had given the journal its name 'in celebration of that moment in our century when revolutionary practice, theoretical inquiry and artistic innovation were joined in a manner exemplary and unique. For the artists of that time and place,' they wrote, 'literature, painting, architecture, film required and generated their own Octobers, radical departures articulating the historical movement which enclosed them, sustaining it through civil war, factional dissension and economic crisis.'³³ In the reformist climate of the West in the 1960s and 1970s, the Russian avant-garde represented, then, an unattainable taste or enjoyment which the Western avant-gardes — despite their link to the 'umbilical cord of gold' — had never actually experienced.

Since the West was discovering the Russian avant-garde at a time when the underground movements in the East were already clearly formed, it is worth asking why the critical consciousness of the neo-left in the West did not seek its pleasure in discovering and analysing these Eastern European movements — its contemporaries — particularly since groups and movements as OHO, Gorgona, Sots-Art, Moscow Conceptualism, Romanian body art and others were neither invisible nor inaccessible; there were enough links between Western intellectual networks and Eastern artistic circles to make contact through any number of channels. But one of the rules of the Western art system's historical narrative in the twentieth century is that it includes only those outsiders who came inside — or who left the outside — who crossed the Cold War's borders and began to operate within the framework of the Western marketplace. For example: Yugoslavia in the 1960s and 1970s was defined by an immensely rich cultural and artistic scene; it prided itself on a policy of open borders and it considered itself to be the most Westernised communist state. But until recently, only two names from this generation — Marina Abramović and Braco Dimitrijević — have had any resonance in the referential frame of the West. Not surprisingly, both live and work in the production framework of Western art. In Forgacs's view, the historical restoration of the Russian avant-garde brought about the recognition of a *different* narrative, one that was parallel to Western modernism. Within this narrative frame, then, the historical avant-garde of other Eastern European countries could also, and to some degree has been, rehabilitated — Czech cubism, Czech surrealism, Polish constructivism, Hungarian constructivism, Hungarian expressionism, for example. But what about the entire post-war artistic production of Eastern Europe, including the post-Stalinist art of the Soviet Union? It remains hidden between the cracks of the two great narratives of modernism.

33. *October* n°1, Spring 1976, p.3

What about the fate of the 'other square', the one of the East European post-avant-garde underground movements, to mention but one of many other exciting stories?

With some wit for decoding and some peculiar imagination with which one can read the future from the past, these stories' moralities as well as their formalities speak straight to the problems of the new century. The century where the plurality of interpretations about our global reality becomes centralised through technology as part of an endless mechanical flow, a web of insufferable egalitarianism, which, in a manner completely different from anti-pluralist Stalinist cultural policy, overrides the 'politics of conflicting temporalities', and in doing so, produces a similarly transcendental effect of endless and eternal spectacle. A chimera of a self-generating reality machine which every day asks us to supply our services for some small compensation but rarely for our opinions and judgments. A kind of world which would seem fine even without us. This situation should finally encourage us to explore and understand how the realities we live in are constructed, and to detect and name their hidden engineers.

Myth and Slovene Art

Sergej Kapus

The historicisation of art is an epistemological construction that is necessarily partial. The past is textually inscribed in the present, but at the same time, it is the present that selects and organises the past, framing and canonising it. The changing quality of reception, the difference between current and previous understandings, and the necessity of actualising what has gone before mean that the past cannot be naturalised; it cannot be an immediate given for us. Art is not a monument that might, in some monological way, reveal its extra-temporal essence.¹ The difference between one's own and another's cultural world entails a different framework for constituting meaning. The continual process of renewing the link between the past and the present requires us to deconstruct the understanding of history as statistics and chronology, an understanding that operates on the basis of time as a fictive homogeneous medium. The difference in reception presupposes again and again a need for canonisation and the articulation of standpoints. In contrast to a classicist study of tradition, it presupposes a critical revision and the deconstruction of the artistic canon. It rejects the authority of judgement and instead recognises context. It is not relativistic, since it limits potential explanations for artworks to the history of their reception. It presupposes the requirement that we show the placement of art in the referential frames of aesthetic experience and in the organisation of the artistic life.

The line of development in art is not something self-evident, natural or finished, precisely because art is continually being re-embedded in new, unique and specific contexts. Older conceptions of history operated on the basis of codification, which in its essence was reductionist and totalising; it was concerned with the homogenisation and centralisation of events and processes and, as a rule, was teleologically oriented. Thus it avoided any analysis of the rhizomatic dimensions of the context such as would be directed towards ideological pluralism and the decentralisation of connections, as well as towards a demonstration of the contradictory and heterogeneous nature of artistic periods. The conception of a context that lacks borders precisely because it is historical² presupposes the deconstruction of totalities and the continual mapping and framing of the artistic field. It presupposes, therefore, the continual actualisation of a frame that locates art in terms of its discourse, its production and its social aspects. Because the changing quality of context presupposes change in interpretation, any given sequential or developmental line can be neither complete nor comprehensive. The discomfort that arises from attempts to decode the myths of painting from the Slovene art context is a clear indication of just how deeply ingrained the biases of historical objectivism are. The demythologising of some of the most prominent representatives of Slovene art³ has shown quite clearly that the structure of the myths served also to establish

1. See H. R. Jauss, *Estetsko izkustvo in literarna hermenevtika*, Literatura, Ljubljana 1998 (originally published as *Ästhetische Erfahrung und literarische Hermeneutik*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt/Main 1982)

2. See J. Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London 1982

3. See S. Kapus, *Ugrabljeni slikar*, Moderna Galerija, Ljubljana 1998; and B. Žerovc, *Rihard Jakopič – umetnik in strateg*, Založba ZRC, Ljubljana 2002

the appearance of connectedness, coherence and continuity in the currents of art in Slovenia and that this was made possible precisely because the myths distorted the frames and criteria of production that conditioned artistic strategies.

For decades, the art-historical explanation of Jožef Petkovšek, one of the most popular Slovene painters, depended on the exclusion of the denotative level of his images and the ahistoricisation of his position. It sought to include Petkovšek in an unbroken artistic chain and to endow his work with evolutionary connotations; it failed, however, to place him within a clearly and precisely defined referential system of production that was historically conditioned. Instead, it tried to explain his work outside of any such system. To do this, the art-historical explanation had to distort the painter's lapses, mis-paintings and deviations from the norms of realist painting so as to inscribe them within a modernist stance, where they would lose the status of mistakes. Thus it instrumentalised the ambiguity of Petkovšek's paintings, which derives from an obvious discrepancy: Petkovšek's images are formulated to serve the imperative of realist rhetoric, but this rhetoric remains unattained, so that there is an ambiguity that stands throughout in indisputable opposition to its criteria. The reception of Petkovšek's later paintings, and in particular his famous work *At Home*, was based, then, on placing what would be mistakes from the perspective of realist mechanics into the context of a modernist methodology; through this transformation, the work was made out to be a precursor of modernism in Slovene painting. In this way, Petkovšek's variance from the norms of realist painting could be seen as relating to a different area of interest, one that, however, has no historically grounded connection whatsoever with Petkovšek. To interpret Petkovšek as an artist who established a tradition of modernism in Slovene painting means to distort his commitment to the norms of the conventional art system, even if he failed to measure up to these norms. The art-historical explanation of Petkovšek presupposes the masking of the institutional frameworks, organisational norms and criteria that conditioned his work. It means distorting the production system in which he was situated, although he failed to meet its standards. With Petkovšek, paradoxically, art history has inverted the operation of interpretation and, essentially, displaced his referential frame. It has actualised an interpretation of Petkovšek that annuls the value of the historical material and pushes him onto the level of a parasitic form able to absorb a different, though likewise historically grounded, chain of causes and effects.⁴ Within the myth, the ambiguity of Petkovšek's paintings is instrumentalised through modernism, but in the process, Petkovšek's discrepancies become, to all appearances, justified, acquiring the value of a false intention, which, paradoxically, requires no reflection or additional explanation. But it is precisely for this reason that the modernist mode of Petkovšek's paintings is interpreted on the level of proclamation. The mythologising of the paintings compels the recognition that their pictorial aspects naturally evoke and justify the mode of modernism. The long insistence on the naturalisation of modernism, as if we were talking about a system of facts and not a semiological system, clearly shows, however, that in Slovene painting the acceptance of modernist strategies was something questionable, difficult and controversial. The Petkovšek myth, indeed, indicates an arranged modernism and a signalisation that befits an essentially reduced status. At the same time, this mythologising of Petkovšek points in a peculiar way, as well, to the limit and quality of modernism's acceptability in Slovene painting.⁵

The demythologising of Petkovšek also revealed a certain discomfort with entering the territory of reception research, which expands and deepens our knowledge of the context in which art emerges and which also determines the

4. See R. Barthes, *Mythologies*, Editions du Seuil, Paris 1957

5. See S. Kapus, *op. cit.*

production of art. Contemporary professional standards in art-historical practice that is concerned with painting from the last quarter of the nineteenth century demand that we also study art institutions, their conditions, roles and mutual influences, as well as their effects. If, for example, we consider the work of Jurij Šubic, who is undoubtedly one of the most prominent painters in Slovene history, we see that the art-historical discussion of his work continues to base itself on research more than sixty years old — research that makes little attempt to address the issue of art institutions in any concrete way. For instance, the institution of the Paris Salon, which placed Šubic within the context of the established artistic criteria and which, especially for foreigners, represented the essential orientation in painting, is barely mentioned in Slovene art history, let alone subjected to the historical analysis it requires. Because art historians writing about Šubic's painting have tended to overlook the referential frames that explain the enormous change in the artist after his arrival in Paris, and because they failed to valorise the roles of institutions and organisational norms, they in fact viewed the change in his painting as something isolated, placing it outside of any concrete context of production. They relocated the change in his painting in some contextually undefined void, having failed to demarcate the referential frame of the art system that conditioned this change. Šubic's transformation in Paris was linked to the concrete and specific valorisation of painting. It concerned the development of a stance that separated painting from modernism in precise terms, placing him within the redefined Salon production that made it possible for Šubic to establish himself within the international context of the time. By labelling his work Salon naturalism we do not bring Šubic closer to modernism but rather place him beyond its horizon.⁶ But this does not imply any undermining of the value of Šubic's transformation. On the contrary, it means understanding the context in which Šubic responded to the demand for modernisation, which, unlike the conservative criteria of the Academy and protectionism, opened the door to international comparisons. But acknowledgement of the European standards of Šubic's most famous painting, *Before the Hunt*, also implies recognition of the huge differences between the reception of painting at home and the reception of it abroad. The artistic conditions in Slovenia at the end of the nineteenth century, as described by the painter Ivan Franke,⁷ clearly show just how far painting still was from being part of a free marketplace, which was one of the conditions for the public bourgeois institutionalisation of art. The assimilation of new representational and design standards in the art centres of Europe meant at the same time a surpassing of the receptive position that dominated the culturally different circumstances in Slovenia. The discrepancy between the provincial artistic climate and the developed institutional art frame inevitably triggered a problem of aesthetic distance or, in other words, a difference in the understanding of art at home and abroad. The receptive difference also conditioned the level of reporting on art, which, unable to interpret the norms of Šubic's changes, made a value judgement between very different works. An essential change in valorisation came later, with the art-historical placement of Šubic's painting in the developmental chain, which, however, again suspended any interpretation of the conditions of Šubic's production. The ambitious modernisation of Šubic's role in Slovene painting caused writers to reject any analysis of the referential frame that conditioned his work. The suspension of such contextual demarcations, then, led to the mystification of Šubic's painting from the developmental perspective.

By decoding such myths we see that art history has been able to establish coherence and continuity between different currents in the Slovene art context only

6. See G. P. Weisberg, *Beyond Impressionism: The Naturalist Impulse* Harry N. Abrams, New York 1992

7. I. Franke, *Slovenska umetnost*, Slovan, Ljubljana 1902-3



Jurij Šubic
Before the Hunt
 oil on canvas, 87 × 65.5 cm,
 1883, National Gallery,
 Ljubljana



Jožef Petkovšek
At Home
 oil on canvas, 121.5 × 134 cm,
 circa 1889, National Gallery,
 Ljubljana

by suppressing, interpretively, the cuts that dismember the diversity of works created around the same time, essentially limiting and simplifying them. To put it another way, art history could be effective only by carrying out a one-sided dissection of the art system. The condition for constructing a coherent developmental line in Slovene art was the erasure of, and amnesia about, the concrete context in which art was created and which also determined its production. The mythologising of art has meant that the myth attempted to deprive art of its history and of the record of its relationship to production. The myth perverted the logic of the inscription and placement of art in the art system. It presupposed a neglect of the network that established art in a given period. Thus it is hardly surprising that the mythologising of art practice erased the concrete network of relations and connections between Slovene art and the wider territory. But elimination of art from the international frame means insistence on locality. The key condition for communication with the international space is the internationalisation of the Slovene art system. Not to analyse the way art practices are embedded within broader referential systems, and to neglect the conceptual and strategic networks that define the concrete nature of these practices, means falling short of internationally comparable levels. Thus any block to critical parallels and comparisons necessarily means the suppression and fixation of the process of historicisation at the local level. The block to dialogue, therefore, means, at its core, the avoidance of postulates of transformational thought, and this inevitably ends in obsession with some hidden eternal essence of artistic expression, with the parochial imagination and provincialism. A reception that erases contexts totalises recognition. In this way, the level of articulation, on which the visual is assimilated into systems of transformation, is adjusted to the level of apparent coherence and complete integration. What is suspended, then, is that mode of vision which takes shape through endless realignment, conflict and discontinuity. To put it another way, such an acceptance of art cannot be based on anything other than prohibitions and the retardation of experience. But on the other hand, neither can it recognise the level it observes as being a unique codification, a model of

articulation. On the contrary, it conceptualises it as an instance, a natural or generally valid framework that can then be transposed and expanded arbitrarily, and not as a historically and ideologically determined practice. We are dealing with a mechanism that recognises a certain relation as natural and fundamental, while in fact it prohibits reflection on any ideological contradictions and erases any analysis of a frame that might situate art in its production and social relations. The core of the prohibition lies, then, precisely in the way it undermines and suppresses the transformational aspect of art while confining the effects of art to an inert system.

Art history was able to construct the connectedness and coherence of Slovene art only by arranging and tailoring — fictively and retroactively — artistic currents to fit a canonical sequence of art within a broader international referential frame. This fictive placement within an international art trend made it permissible to conceal the breaks, interruptions and disconnectedness of Slovene art. Studies of the concrete artistic material have, however, in very many cases confirmed just the opposite, namely, that the referential frame of Slovene art is not, indeed, the canonical tendency of art on the basis of which the Slovene art-historical tradition has compiled its developmental narrative. But this merely fictive inscription in the broader referential system, of course, also entails the exclusion of broader valorisation criteria and the loss of transparent assessment. It implies a schism in judgement, the establishment of double standards and, in the final instance, also the blocking of dialogue with the international space. After all, the locally valid criteria, which have, in a merely fictive way, inscribed the local space into a broader internationally established system, are deconstructed by the very fact that this system is operational and effective. Analyses of the myths of Slovene art have dismantled the conception that the system of developmental trends is something self-evident, certain and natural; on the contrary, these analyses have exposed the fictive aspect of its construction. It has been disassembled by a historical analysis that concretises comparisons with the broader cultural space. Such analysis demonstrates the incompatibility and ineffectiveness of local myths in the international space. Of crucial importance, then, is the fact that this decoding of myths undermines a construction that has erased the heterogeneity, ideological plurality, multi-layeredness and contradictoriness within artistic periods. By deconstructing these myths we see the partialness of the process of historicisation and the bias of a conception that sought to explain and assess historical events in a one-way causal direction and to codify them in chains of unified and homogeneous periods.

But the process of historicising art, since it cannot be made to rest on any given basis, is far from being arbitrary. Precisely because it has the status of a hypothetical construction, it does not free the art-historical discipline to do as it pleases but rather presents it with a heavy responsibility. The historical context in which art appears is not some factual chain of events that exists independently of the viewer. And the viewer in the 1980s is not the same as today's viewer. It is through the viewer and his mediation that art enters the changing horizon of experience. And with every change in this horizon, tradition, too, of course, is played out in a new way. For this reason, the severing and erasing of ties between past and present experience implies the impossibility of interpreting contemporary products using antiquated conceptual categories.⁸ The reluctance of the art-historical approach when it comes to contemporary art implies a refusal to examine the historical codification of the sequential chain — since such examination would simultaneously entail a look at both the art of the present and at the selection of the past to which it supposedly belongs. The rejection of new theoretical networks and concepts that seek to re-evaluate the

8. See Tomaž Brejc's essay in B. Murovec (ed.), *Slovenska umetnostna zgodovina. Tradicija, problemi, perspektive*, Založba ZRC, Ljubljana 2004

codified past is, therefore, a way of naturalising the past and displaying history as something natural, as if there were a given connection between the past and meaning.

The modern conception of history is oriented toward dismantling displays of uniformity. It has deconstructed the logic of linear development and seeks to draw attention to multiplicity, contradictoriness, heterogeneity and decentredness in the interdependence between events and processes. The position of contemporary art is homologous. In Slovenia, too, art practices are heterogeneous, multilayered and decentred. Art today is not limited by generalisation and uniformity. If the well-known American critic Clement Greenberg was still able to imagine that modernism had taken art to a more articulated place of self-awareness and declarativeness, in that it made explicit and laid bare basic procedures and methods that had been concealed in classic art practice, then today it is clear that such a project of generalisation has been undermined by a project that, with every new manifestation, merely changes into something unique and particular. Of course, postmodernism has not nullified the achievements of modernism, but it has begun to shake up the teleology of art, to question a way of thinking that is based on a logic of generalisation and reduction. Postmodernism has pointed to discontinuity, differential coding and fragmentation. It has put forward the conviction that the practice of a certain discourse cannot transcend the boundaries of its own partialness. Hence the ideological plurality and hybridity of contemporary art, which continually demonstrates for us, in its own heterogeneity, the fact that art does not possess any totalising criterion.

The dismantling of myths has drawn our attention to the reductionist explanations of a history based on uniform motives and has spotlighted the significance of the particular, exotic and marginal. The historical context and the differences between one's own and the other's worlds require us to separate our own horizon from that of the other; for this reason we must constantly re-articulate our own standpoint. The decoding of myths has drawn attention to the fact that consumers of mythologised art interpret the production of meaning as if this were about an argumentation of fact rather than a system of values. Such decoding has dismantled the interpretation of meaning on the level of naturalised causal connectedness. The narrative of a coherent art tradition in Slovenia, of an unbroken rational sequence of trends and periods, and of a linear development is, therefore, a construction that distorts its own ideological inventedness. Of course, the process of constructing an appearance of unity and continuity in Slovene art in no way implies that this image is arbitrary or even socially neutral. Just as myths about Slovene art are historically conditioned, this image of unity is also historically conditioned. It continues to exert a tremendous influence in Slovenia even today, despite the fact that recent conceptions of historicity are directed towards the dismantling of former totalities. What, then, instrumentalises this image? The answer is simple. It concerns a logic in which this notion of art's continuity, coherence and homogeneity is inscribed as a trans-historical construction and, as such, naturally serves the representation of the national. To put it more precisely, it serves a conception that operates through a model of national identity that does not allow itself to be understood as something internally laced by a web of difference, contradiction and conflict but rather as something that must be accepted as substantially given, positive, unique, authentic and fundamentally without contradiction. But the strategy of demythologising has also pointed to discontinuity, or rather, to the fact that what constitutes the continuity of Slovene art is, on the contrary, a series of breaks or cuts with the art of the past, each one interrupting the

continuity and reformulating the tradition.⁹ Inasmuch as the analytical procedures of decoding the myth do not posit identity as something unique, substantial and on the positive level of a fact, these procedures also do not conceive the series of influences — the introduction of models and patterns from the broader art system to the narrower system — as something that could externally threaten and deconstruct the image of authentic art. And it is precisely here that we find the core of the discomfort that arises in conjunction with the decoding of myths. The process of decoding is, indeed, understood not as the deconstruction of a fictive placement, but rather as a threat that could mean the loss of authentic history. Discomfort with the demythologising of the image of Slovene art is, then, the consequence of positing national identity as a positive basis and fixed standard that defines what is domestic and what is foreign. The demythologising strategy, however, does just the opposite; by pointing to discontinuity, interruption and breaks with tradition it attempts to persuade us that artistic practice may be treated through discrimination and segregation. Thus it makes it impossible to marginalise artistic practices. For every artistic practice is constituted within an intertextuality that inundates it.¹⁰

Intertextuality, however, opens up multiple links between art and the heterogeneity of social practices. In the perspective of intertextuality, art acquires the status of an open work that no longer has firm boundaries; it is not whole, but rather something dialogic and unfinished that encompasses a wider field of semiotic interaction than that which is presented by the teleological reductionist narrative about the past.

9. See M. Dolar, 'Slovenska nacionalna identiteta in kultura — Navodila za uporabo', in N. Pagon, M. Čepič (eds.), *Nacionalna identiteta in kultura*, Inštitut za civilizacijo in kulturo, Ljubljana 2003; and B. Groys, *Teorija sodobne umetnosti: izbrani eseji*, Študentska založba, Ljubljana 2002

10. See J. Kristeva, *Semeiotike: recherches pour une sémalyse*, Editions du Seuil, Paris 1969

From the Black Square to the White Flag

Jürgen Harten

The burgeoning rapprochement between East and West, gradually intensifying from the early 1970s onwards, presupposed that both sides should unilaterally rid themselves of their latent prejudicial stereotypes. Furthermore, it assumed that they would downplay ideological implications to such an extent, that respective ideological and systemic differences might be discussed in terms of both subject-specific and system-specific criteria. Joint exhibitions would not have been possible at all without a viable consensus at each step of the way. Of course, the further back in time the particular epoch lay and the more one limited oneself, seemingly apolitically, to the mere exchange of academic art-historical positions, the easier it became to arrive there. However, as soon as one was called upon to emphasise salient aspects or make an evaluation — current trends notwithstanding — one always ran the risk of stirring up tender political sensibilities.

From today's vantage point it is possible to say that at all times during these exchanges, unspoken national or local agendas and functions of the operating system 'Art' were also being negotiated. First there was the relative contradiction between the institutionalised complex of academies, museums and representative exhibition apparatus on the one hand, and on the other, all the localised, chiefly extra-institutional, alternative, 'unofficial' or 'underground' activities, where a distinction should also be drawn between the bureaucratic centralism of the East and western pluralism. Within this contradiction lay another one, namely the dichotomy between the old and the new, between the mission to preserve the cultural legacy and the impertinence of current artistic trends. This in turn followed the gamut of discourses on the subject of avant-garde and mass culture and postulated the comparison between aesthetic innovation, ideological codification, industrial production and commercial marketing — from VCHUTEMAS and the Bauhaus to the convergence of the mass-medial Sots-Realism and pop culture.

In 1977 an ICOM congress took place in Moscow and Leningrad for the first time and propagated the idea of an international cultural exchange. As far as the Soviet Union and the Federal Republic of Germany were concerned (the GDR is not under discussion here), an exchange of exhibitions had already started earlier; ironically, the first one had been held in Baden-Baden, the spa town beloved of Russians in days gone by. This was the place where in 1972 Klaus Gallwitz had succeeded in exhibiting Russian art — from the nineteenth century and then later, encompassing the years 1890 to 1917 — without actually overstepping the mark of what was officially considered 'Soviet' art post-1917.

In the autumn of 1977 and under the auspices of the European Council, the interdisciplinary exhibition *Tendencies in 1920s Art* took place under the direction of

Dieter Honisch. It incorporated exponents of the Eastern European avant-garde, even though the countries concerned were still excluded. Six months earlier the left-wing Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst (New Society for the Fine Arts) in West Berlin succeeded in putting together an exhibition entitled *Soviet art during the period of collectivization and industrialization 1927–33*, which was engineered by Hubertus Gassner and Eckhart Gillen in conjunction with the Tretjakov Gallery Moscow under what must have been arduous circumstances. The programmatic title of the accompanying publication *Kunst aus der Revolution* (Art from the Revolution) and *Kunst in die Produktion* (Art in Production) left in no doubt the fact that the organisers fully intended to engage with the Soviet context, despite manifest differences of opinion. They compensated for the missed opportunity of *Documenta 5* in Kassel in 1972, where the Soviet side had had the opportunity to take up Harald Szeemann's invitation to exhibit art from the 1920s and 30s. The breakthrough was left to Pontus Hultén's epochal *Paris–Moscow 1900–1930* staged in Paris in 1979, before a counterpart loyal to the party line could eventually be shown in Moscow in 1981. Visitors waited in long queues in front of the Pushkin Museum in order to lay eyes on previously unseen avant-garde works from the Soviet warehouses and archives, as well as collections from the West.

The Rhineland, in particular Düsseldorf, became the preferred place to show art from the Soviet Union. This was above all thanks to concentrated initiatives on the part of the Deutsche Bank, Ruhrgas AG, the *Ostabteilung im Bundesverband der deutschen Industrie* (the Eastern section of the German CBI), the Soviet Embassy in the Federal Republic, the Ministries for Culture of the USSR and of the Russian Federation RSFSR, the German Foreign Office, the Federal State of Northrhine-Westphalia as well as the City of Düsseldorf itself. Marking the beginning, in October 1977, was the first exhibition in the West of a part of the legendary Costakis collection, namely the section that had been left to the collector as compensation for the other part which had to remain in Moscow when he returned to Greece. For its time in 1983, an extraordinarily unusual public-private partnership between the Deutsche Bank and the Tretjakov Gallery led to an exhibition of 'hot' contemporary art from the Federal Republic and West Berlin, which the director of Düsseldorf's Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, Karl-Heinz Hering, had assembled for Moscow, where, bearing the innocuous title *People and landscapes in contemporary painting and illustration*, it managed to elude censorship. In 1985 the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf was host to *Tradition and The Present Day: Six Centuries of Russian and Soviet Art*, curated by Pavel Khoroshilov. The aim of this comprehensive counter-exhibition was to project an impression of art in Russia as a transcendent, essentially constant entity beyond temporal classification; in so doing, it made use of 'constellations' orchestrated by the Soviet Communist Party's chief designer Schpak, who synchronologically juxtaposed artworks from the most diverse epochs, including examples of recent folklore styled narrative or photorealistic trends. Only Sots-Art and Moscow Conceptualism were missing, presumably because the Russian commissioners considered the aesthetic deconstruction of the Soviet milieu as counter-productive or indeed, because the artists had refused their co-operation. However, this omission was rectified with Ilya Kabakov's first exhibition in the West, which Düsseldorf's Kunstverein had adopted from the Kunsthalle Bern in Switzerland.

The topos 'avant-garde' was symptomatic for the very difficulties both sides wanted to overcome. One could imagine that the rump of Soviet state-sponsored avant-gardism did not want to liberate those sequestered, marginalised avant-garde artworks from the warehouses, whence they had been consigned, whereas others

longed for nothing more than to share the art historical recognition of their legacy with the West. What was the West's motivation, however? Was it the opportunity of breaching the Soviet system or the endeavour to take comprehensive stock of the canon of the Russian avant-garde, which, apart from a brief hiatus during the Nazi era in Germany, had been ever present in the West? How could one possibly succeed in separating the innovative, emancipatory aspirations of this avant-garde from its initial revolutionary and proselytizing impetus — which had all but become its undoing — so that the utopian surplus value would not be squandered? What was present and what was past?

Even during the ICOM congress in 1977 only a handful of specialists had seen the original version of Malevich's *Black Square*; so it was in 1980, thanks to the engagement of a number of functionaries — above all Semjonov, the Soviet Ambassador to the Federal Republic of Germany — that the first monographic exhibition of Malevich's works from Soviet collections was held at the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, precipitating an almighty row. Suslov, chief ideologue of the Soviet Communist Party, cancelled the rest of the exhibition's planned itinerary to Hamburg and Baden-Baden. A valedictory cello concert was held in the Kunsthalle at midnight; flowers were laid beneath the paintings, tears were shed. It was not until the end of the decade that the climate was right for unrestrained co-operation. A few days after the collapse of the Berlin Wall, experts on Tatlin convened at the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf for a tri-lingual symposium (German, Russian and English) accompanied by an improvised exhibition with works by Dan Flavin, Zvi Goldstein, Imi Knoebel and Ilya Kabakov amongst others, with the intention of commemorating the uninterrupted and continued Tatlin reception by artists. The symposium was also a preparation for the grand retrospective of 1993, for a world première (Düsseldorf, Baden-Baden, Moscow), and a meticulous reconstruction of the model for the tower for the 3rd International in Pensa, the town where Tatlin had once studied.

In the interim the West was not slow in critically incorporating the avant-garde of the early twentieth century. At the beginning of the 1980s and at the behest of the former Federal German President Walter Scheel, Harald Szeemann was entrusted with the job of instigating an exhibition devoted to the cultural integration of Europe. It was called *The Tendency towards the Gesamtkunstwerk (a synthesis of all the arts) — European Utopias since 1800* and was shown in 1983–4 in Zürich, Düsseldorf, Vienna and Brussels. There were a few examples of Russian avant-garde, but overall the hope of support from Eastern Europe bore little fruit. However, the aim of the exhibition was not to write an historical account, but rather to map out the thematic context. In this way totalitarian utopias, in particular the Third Reich, came under the spotlight, though not historically reconstructed, but communicated rather via the complexion of their demise. In the accompanying anthology there are contributions by Bazon Brock and by Jean Clair — the latter bearing the title 'The Third Reich — the *Gesamtkunstwerk* of a perverted Occident', which alluded to Anselm Kiefer's 'heroic metaphors', Syberberg's film about Hitler and Albert Speer's memoirs, to name but three. Four years later Boris Groys's interpretation of Soviet culture *Gesamtkunstwerk Stalin* was published. It had been known for a long time that Germans and Russians alike had radically opposed early modernism with parallel vigour, but a comparison of the regimes was only possible during the latter part of the 1980s, as was the discussion of the differing ideological conditions.

The fact that the break with modernism should be seen in the context of a post avant-garde 'return to order', as had been propagated during the 1930s in Europe,

was amply illustrated by an exhibition in 1987 in the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf. The exhibition had been realised under the auspices of a project by Jörn Merkert — in Düsseldorf at that time — to commemorate 1937 as the year in which the final campaign against ‘entartete Kunst’ (degenerate art) was launched. Bearing the title *The Axe Has Blossomed* (after Paul Celan), the show reconstructed parts of the 1937 World Exhibition in Paris, in which Germany, the Soviet Union and Italy had paraded their imperial visions, whilst in the adjacent Spanish Pavilion, Picasso’s *Guernica* somberly prefigured in exemplary fashion the impending disaster of World War II. The Soviet section was comprised almost exclusively of documents, apart from a model of the Palace of the Soviets reconstructed from photographs; evidently the limit of what is and what is not admissible had been reached. The ministry responsible in Moscow had declined participation in the exhibition on the grounds that socialist realism should not be linked with fascism in any way. Only a few months later during a slide show, an overcrowded auditorium at the Central House of Artists in Moscow responded to juxtaposed images of the Nazi and Soviet Pavilions in 1937 with spontaneous applause.

Only after the point had been reached when Russia was no longer synonymous with the Soviet system, was it possible to look back freely at those euphoric visions of the future and its catastrophic demise. In 1992–3 the ‘Great Utopia’ was celebrated in Frankfurt, Amsterdam, New York, Moscow and St. Petersburg in the form of an exhibition, organised by Christoph Vitali, exclusively presenting the now so named ‘Russian’ avant-garde between the years 1915 and 1932; subsequently, in 1993–4 Hubertus Gassner, Joseph Kiblitzy and Yevgenia Petrova were to present *Agitation of Happiness: Soviet Art of the Stalin Era* in Kassel and St. Petersburg. In 1996–7 the exhibition *Berlin–Moscow 1900–1950* finally followed in the two capitals, a show organised by Jörn Merkert and the influential director of the Pushkin Museum, Irina Antonova, along the lines of Hultén’s *Paris–Moscow* in an endeavour to critically incorporate the historical avant-garde and Stalin’s ‘great patriotic war’ against Hitler.

All divergent stylistic and propagandistic manifestations notwithstanding, the retrospectives on the topos ‘avant-garde’ can almost be regarded as avant-garde projects in their own right, in as much as they allow the very thing the ruling culture had temporarily annexed and degraded to be perceived *post festum* as fiction once more. However, in the interim, what has become of the expectation of that ‘forging ahead’ we so readily associate with the term ‘avant-garde’?

The answer to this question can be found in the USA. The conditions for its development were being incubated towards the end of the 1930s and the beginning of the 1940s, as Serge Guilbaut describes in his book *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War* 1983. Artists, as well as modernist apologists such as Meyer Schapiro and Clement Greenberg, who were not initially indisposed to Trotskyist ideas, were finally taught a lesson by the Hitler–Stalin Pact in 1941. What emerged was to be of a permanently ambivalent nature. On the one hand the idea of an artwork’s individual autonomy prevailed, in which artistic freedom is on a par with that of the entrepreneur and art itself regarded thus as the source of innovation. On the other hand, sympathy for emancipatory, so-called progressive, i.e. left-wing tendencies also developed, although not necessarily ones which were to be equated with social or political agitation. The utopian vision of a ‘world language of abstract art’ with which the USA still countered socialist realism in 1958 at the World Exposition in Brussels, mutated in Europe a decade later into the utopia of a ‘governmentless language’.¹ In between there was pop art and

1. See M. L. Syring, *Um 1968: konkrete Utopien in Kunst und Gesellschaft*, Städtische Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, Düsseldorf 1990

Nouveau Realisme, not to mention other models opposing abstraction, as Werner Hofmann had shown in an exhibition, *Neuer Realismus & Pop Art*, which was shocking for its time in Vienna in 1964 (also shown in West Berlin).

The last leftist avant-garde, which one might readily associate with the revolutionary impetus of the early twentieth century, was conveyed in the grassroots democracy and anti-institutional slogans of the 1968 student movement. Pontus Hultén sent an exhibition from Stockholm on its travels with the slogan *Change the world! Poetry must be made by all!* (after Marx and Lautréamont), combining early Soviet and surrealist documents with photographs of a classless ethnicity, and in Düsseldorf supplemented by posters from the Paris Atelier Populaire. Fluxus was omnipresent in the Rhineland, albeit without much heed being necessarily paid to the egalitarian communist doctrine of its founder Maciunas. More pertinent was the attempt by Joseph Beuys to transform the Staatliche Kunstakademie in Düsseldorf into a 'free international university'.

In Düsseldorf, the *Prospect* series was initiated from 1968 onwards — an 'international preview of art in the galleries of the avant-garde,' whereby the term avant-garde was charged with a decidedly progressive polarity, unlike today's narrow definition as a mere market prognosis. *Prospect 71 Projection* premiered the works of artists in the fields of photography, slide projections, film and video. The Rhineland abounded around 1970 with a highly contemporary mixture of actionist, performance, procedural, intermedial and conceptual art, itself owing much to the shattering of the traditional definition of what an artwork is and spotlighting *sub specie artis* new strategies for engaging critically with social, political and existential conditions. At this point the interface for a temporal comparison with corresponding artistic processes or strategies in Eastern Europe and specifically in Russia can be located here, conveying the impression that such achievements are somehow 'belated versions' of western counterparts; it must be said, however, that this is only so in the sense of an internationally recognised chronology of avantgardism, which in turn attempts to define who was ahead of whom in terms of relevant artistic freedom without regard to the actual context. The opposing thesis alleges that the avant-garde in the West has repeatedly overlooked the fact that its dreams had long since been dreamt in the Soviet Union and were now well and truly over.

After 1987, several exhibitions in the West, among others the *Binationale Israel/USSR* in Düsseldorf, Jerusalem and Moscow, highlighted the fact that, since the late 1970s, the Soviet Russian avant-garde had arrived at its own interpretative slant when investigating the state of *homo sovieticus* and the deconstruction of his 'imperial spectacular'. It shared the fate of 'unofficial art' in which modernist rudiments had survived, but limited itself above all to a conceptual critical appraisal of the lost avant-garde. What remained was deemed to be 'rubbish', as in Kabakov's *Red Waggon*, or simply avant-garde pop.

In the meantime, an explosive reprocessing of hitherto burnt-out avant-gardists was undertaken by the movement of Neue Slowenische Kunst, the key players of which exposed a rich regional complex of current socialist, repressed Germanic, folklore-styled religious and East-based utopian elements, ultimately stylizing it into a *Gesamtkunstwerk* of European standing — music and theatre included. Appearing as a collective, the artists behaved in the manner of 'retro-gardists' in order to bathe in the kind of pathos, which once had moved totalitarianism of every discernible hue and thus to emerge as though reborn. In the summer of 1987 and for the first time in Germany, the collective calling itself IRWIN exhibited an ensemble of paintings rendered in a style which they conceived to become their trademark in a shed outside

the *Documenta* in Kassel; this ensemble, treated individually as icons, invoked the power of the paintings themselves and included examples of the fusion of supremacist and Nazi symbols.

Berlin–Moscow/Moscow–Berlin 1950–2000, the central pillar of the elaborately furnished *German-Russian Cultural Encounter 2003/4*, itself a series of events established at the highest level imaginable, almost foundered upon the difficulty of assimilating the divergent strategies of the curatorial team. The initial premise was clear enough: it was expected to be a continuation of the earlier exhibition on the first half of the twentieth century. It was to be interdisciplinary in like manner, but should also encompass the present day. The Moscow contingent comprising Khoroshilov, Degot and Misiano, who, in parallel with Boris Groys for Frankfurt am Main, had prepared the quasi-prequel exhibition *Dream Factory Communism: the Visual Culture of the Stalin Era*, could safely assume that the *Berlin–Moscow* exhibition would be predicated upon an interdisciplinary, intermedial discourse — the criteria for which they readily supplied. Conversely, the Berlin contingent comprising Harten, Schneider and Tannert wanted to apply other criteria to the task of cultural-historical periodization; institutionally speaking, they were unprepared for the ensuing war of attrition with the centralised Russian *Kulturapparat* and, by way of consensus, suggested compiling a list of key artists. The result was stalemate. In the one corner there was the criticism that an outmoded concept for art was being invoked and that a market-led top ten was being launched; in the other corner, there was the suspicion of ideological ‘mothering’, which in turn might enable one to wriggle out of individual interpretation of the artworks, themselves merely serving to illustrate a mass cultural discourse. A solution to the deadlock emerged after both parties agreed, in spite of everything, to adhere to the premise of an integrated exhibition and to regard both Berlin and Moscow as pre-eminent sites of the international East-West conflict, i.e. to involve the USA. In addition there was the reversal of the usual methodology. The present was not to be seen then as the product of an appraisal of a divided history, but rather that the waters should be charted ‘from the vantage point of today’, rendering both parties’ recollections to be of comparative interest. To this end the parties involved were able to agree upon about a dozen parameters, neglecting however to insist upon a consistent interpretive approach. However, it was not until the idea was mooted that these, in part extremely heterogeneous artworks should be linked by means of ‘constellations’ or groupings — practically speaking also in the sense of ‘encounters’ in the museums themselves — that the dilemma could be resolved. The idea of these ‘constellations’ liberated the artworks from the confines of their specific affiliations, facilitated the deconstruction of respective conventional reception and granted enough manoeuvring space for an autonomous Moscow equivalent of the show initiated in Berlin. In this way, the exhibition achieved its political mission in the face of all previous negative expectation, by becoming a vehicle for the clash of images rather than via the vested arguments of an historians’ dispute. To put it another way, it became more a critical phantasmagoria than an affirmative lesson.

Translated from German by Timothy Connell

Art for an Avant-Garde Society

Belgrade in the 1970s

Lutz Becker

The exhibition *After the Wall*, organised in 1999 by the Moderna Museet, Stockholm, was the first comprehensive presentation of contemporary art from Eastern Europe, Central Europe and the Balkans that appeared after the collapse of communism in 1989.¹ During the 1990s, the re-orientation of artistic developments in the 'East' gained enormous momentum; the works shown in this exhibition demonstrated independence and conceptual maturity. This was not surprising for those who knew the history of the dissident avant-gardes and the underground work of non-conformist artists in the former Soviet Bloc countries. It should be stated that the renewal of a contemporary artistic culture in the 'East' was due in no small part to the efforts of an earlier generation of artists who had been insistent and passionate enough to fight for their individuality and freedom of expression. It must not be forgotten either that most artists living in Soviet-dominated Eastern Europe were, throughout the years of the Cold War, prisoners in their own countries, restrained by the prevailing Party doctrine favouring socialist realism and other anti-modernist tendencies.

Even though the cultural climate was gradually more relaxed after 1956 when Khrushchev denounced Stalin's policies, the process of liberalisation was delayed for more than twenty-five years in the Soviet Union and East Germany. Here, the making and exhibiting of non-conformist works and non-representational art remained banned. This led, for instance, to a particularly disgraceful moment in the history of the USSR, namely the destruction of an open-air exhibition in Moscow by military force and bulldozers in September 1974. Various acts of suppression in Estonia and Lithuania as well as in Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania are now history. Yet the efforts aimed at self-liberation of a hidden avant-garde remained virtually unknown in the West. There were notable developments in Poland and Czechoslovakia where, over time, small groups of artists and intellectual outsiders had achieved considerable elbow-room, a kind of freedom in disgrace. The situation for art and artists in Yugoslavia, however, was totally different; it evolved under very exceptional social and political conditions.²

As one of the victorious powers of World War II, with links to both the USSR and Western Allies, Yugoslavia escaped the fate of being turned into a Soviet satellite under the dictate of Moscow. Josip Broz Tito (b. 1892 — d. 1980), the head of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY) utilised his great reputation as wartime leader of the Partisan movement, which had liberated the lands of Yugoslavia from Nazi occupation, to break relations with Josef Stalin in 1948. This single act laid the foundation for his country's independence and political direction, which resulted in the creation of an authentic Yugoslav model of socialism. In danger of being immobilised between the fronts of the Cold War, in 1961, Tito (together with

1. *After the Wall: Art and Culture in post-Communist Europe* was prepared by Bojana Pejić, chief curator, in cooperation with David Elliott, the then Director of Moderna Museet, and Iris Mueller-Westermann, curator of Moderna Museet. After Stockholm, the exhibition toured in 2000 to Budapest (Ludwig Museum) and Berlin (Hamburger Bahnhof, 2000-1). See B. Pejić, D. Elliott (eds.), *After the Wall* (exh. cat.), Moderna Museet, Stockholm 1999

2. Essential reading regarding the situation of art in Eastern Europe is the anthology edited by Laura Hoptman and Tomáš Pospiszył, *Primary Documents*, MoMA, New York and MIT Press, Cambridge 2002. A useful overview of artistic developments in Yugoslavia in the twentieth century is given in the book edited by Dubravka Djurić and Miško Šuvaković, *Impossible Histories: Historical Avant-Gardes, Neo-Avant-Gardes and Post-avant-gardes in Yugoslavia*, MIT Press, Cambridge 2003

presidents Nehru of India and Nasser of Egypt) initiated a movement of Non-Aligned Countries, which at that time included almost all recently decolonised Asian and African states, with which Yugoslavia soon formed firm alliances. This gave Yugoslavia the space to pursue an independent foreign policy on an international scale and to be a catalyst and bridgehead between East and West.

Built as a federation of six Republics, Tito's Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia united them under the authority of a Communist Party, which itself reflected certain devolutionary characteristics in structure and in name. In 1953, the year Yugoslavia launched its system of self-management as a new form of socialist economy, the CPY was renamed the League of the Communists of Yugoslavia (with branches in each of the Republics). The State and the Party provided the political focus for the Balkan region, which comprised of many different national, religious and cultural traditions. These differences were not viewed as divisive but rather as enriching. Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and the autonomous region of Vojvodina, once part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, retained their Central European character, the Adriatic countries Montenegro and parts of Slovenia were geographically and historically close to Italy, while Serbia and Macedonia, once part of the Byzantine Empire, were influenced by their Christian-Orthodox heritage. Living and co-operating within the Federation gave the citizens of modern Yugoslavia respect for the different histories and creeds in the individual Republics. This sense of belonging within a multicultural context fostered a kind of 'internal internationalism'. This internal openness was at the root of a general worldview, which was internationalist and in essence Western European.

Yugoslavia was represented at the Venice Biennale from 1950 onwards, and although it was not the only communist country maintaining a pavilion at the Giardini, it was the very first socialist state to exhibit abstract art there as early as 1958.³ While artists from the Warsaw Pact countries were not allowed to travel abroad (for fear of defection), Yugoslav artists were free to travel in a private, unsupervised capacity from the early 1960s onwards, to extend their education and to participate in exhibitions and conferences.

Throughout the Cold War what we in the 'West' knew of serious contemporary art from the 'East' was very limited. We had seen Polish posters and Czechoslovak book illustration in the 1960s. There was of course the occasional appearance of Eastern European orchestras, ballet companies and folk ensembles. But it was the art of the cinema, which was a window into the cultures hidden behind the 'Iron Curtain'. The visual arts were largely absent.⁴

The only gallery in Great Britain that exhibited art from Eastern and Central Europe was that of Richard Demarco in Edinburgh. He presented art from Romania and Hungary and, in 1972, presented the Polish performance artist Tadeusz Kantor and his theatre company. As the result of his visit to Yugoslavia, Demarco presented the work of artists from Belgrade and Ljubljana alongside the first appearance of Joseph Beuys in Britain at the Edinburgh Festival in 1973. Here I personally made the acquaintance of artists who I later came to know more closely. Their exhibition was comprised of concept notes, photographs and documents of performances, which they had given during their short stay in Scotland. The artists were Marina Abramović, who presented the first version of her performance *Rhythm 10*; Raša Todosijević, who, together with his partner Marinela Koželj, performed his piece *Decision as Art*; Zoran Popović presented film and slide works *Action*, while Gergelj Urkom's performance entailed the upholstery of a chair in slow motion *Mental and Physical Works*; and Neša Paripović exhibited his first photographic work *Portraits*.⁵

3. See Ž. Koščević, *Venice Biennale and Yugoslav Modern Art 1895-1988* (exh. cat.), Gallery of Contemporary Art, Zagreb 1988

4. The exhibition *Europa, Europa 1994* covered avant-garde art in Eastern Europe throughout the twentieth century. See R. Stanisławski, C. Brockhaus (eds.), *Europa, Europa: Das Jahrhundert der Avantgarde in Mittel- und Osteuropa* (exh. cat.), Vols. I-IV, Kunst und Ausstellungshalle der Republik Deutschland, Bonn 1994

5. J. Tijardović (ed.), *Eight Yugoslav Artists*, Richard Demarco Gallery, Edinburgh 1973

6. See F. Malsch, 'Das Studentski kulturni centar', in *Kunstforum*, Vol. 117, 1992; also B. Pejić, 'Belgrad oder das Paradox als Bedingung der Existenz', in *Focus Belgrade* (exh. cat.), ifa-Galerie, Berlin 1998

7. *Art in Revolution*, producer/director Lutz Becker, Arts Council of Great Britain 1972 (colour, b&w, 50 min)

8. For the relationship between 'revisionist Marxism' and Yugoslav modernist art of the 1960s, particularly the international movement New Tendencies found in Zagreb in 1961, see D. Egbert, *Social Radicalism and the Arts – Western Europe: A Cultural History from the French Revolution to 1968*, Gerald Duckworth & co., London 1970, p. 703 also pp. 371-4, pp. 699-700, pp. 703-5

9. C. Gray, *The Great Experiment: Russian Art 1863-1922*, Thames & Hudson, London 1962. The book was translated into Serbo-Croat by Branko Vučićević and published as *Ruski umetnički eksperiment 1863-1922*, Jugoslavija, Belgrade 1978

10. D. Blažević, 'Who's that singing over there? Art in Yugoslavia and after 1949-1989', in *Aspects/Positions. 50 Years of Art in Central Europe 1949 – 1999*, Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, Vienna 1999, pp. 92-3. The Student Centre in Zagreb, founded in 1961 by Dubravko Horvatić, was the first in Yugoslavia. It became a model for the Student Centres which were founded later. After the appointment in 1966 of Želimir Košćević as its head, the Gallery of the SC in Zagreb became the most important platform in

These young artists were closely affiliated with the Student Cultural Centre (SKC) of the University of Belgrade.⁶ We met again in London and spent a week in conversation, undertaking urban adventures together. My friends spoke excellent English and were well informed about current art theory. As I found out, many of their contemporaries spoke and read English, which enabled them to connect easily with international trends. After their return the group and the SKC invited me to show my film *Art in Revolution* in Belgrade.

The film was based on the exhibition *Art in Revolution*, which had been organised in 1971 for London's Hayward Gallery by the pioneering art historian Camilla Gray; I had collaborated with her on both the exhibition and the film. This film was partly a record of the exhibition, partly an attempt to re-construct the creative enthusiasm of the early years of the October Revolution, full of new images and sequences of original archival footage.⁷ In 1974, I was asked to introduce the film to the participants of the *Third April Meeting*, an international Expanded Media Festival, which was held annually at the SKC from 1972 onwards. At that point my expectations of Yugoslavia were not much different to those I had of other socialist countries.

The idealistic vision of a 'socialism with a human face', which had been destroyed by the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, was still intact in Yugoslavia. I knew from my own experience the totalitarian conditions in East Germany and the Soviet Union, and for me the 'Yugoslav experiment' was a remarkable phenomenon, which succeeded in mellowing my post-1968 disillusionment. A mixture of market and command (i.e. State) economy resulted in a simple but balanced standard of living, there existed a respect for privacy and freedom of expression (as long as the Party was not attacked), free artistic expression and open borders, which allowed international exchanges.⁸

The screenings of my film were packed. The audiences were well informed and had often detailed knowledge of the Russian and Soviet avant-garde. The idealistic utopianism of the early revolutionary phase of the Soviet Union expressed in a wide range of experimental art and design excited the imagination of the audiences. Students especially found strong points of identification with the artists of that 'heroic' period. It was surprising how many students of art history knew Camilla Gray's book *The Great Experiment* and referred to it in our conversations. In 1978, its Serbo-Croat translation was published in Belgrade.⁹

There had been a number of academics and art writers who had engaged critically with the Soviet avant-garde. The person leading this debate from the 1950s was Lazar Trifunović, professor of modern art at Belgrade University. His work had been important in the discussion and dissection of socialist realism and had contributed greatly to the fall of this doctrine in Yugoslavia. In 1968 he published an article, entitled 'The Art of October' in the Belgrade art journal *Umetnost*, n° 13. There were also a number of literary and cultural journals, including the organ of the Student's Union of Belgrade, *Student*, that carried articles on the classic European and Soviet avant-gardes in the fields of art, theatre, poetry, music and film. They discussed the continuity of ideas, their political implications and their application in contemporary, minimalist, analytical and conceptual art in the 'West' and Yugoslavia.

For the people I met at the Student Cultural Centre, 1968 had been a crucial year. Like France and Germany, Yugoslavia also had its students' revolt, particularly violent in Belgrade, in early June 1968, while in the rest of Europe students demonstrated against the war in Vietnam, against neo-fascism and for the abdication

of capitalism in favour of a society guided by socialist principles. The anti-authoritarian component of the students' uprising in the 'West' provided the spark that ignited similar events in Yugoslavia. Here students demonstrated against a rigid Party-bureaucracy, the tired phrases of the 'red bourgeoisie' and for a return to the fundamental values of socialism. At this time, the students were opposed by large sections of the Party-officialdom, but attracted the sympathy of Tito, who initially intervened on their behalf.

Dunja Blažević remembers:

Those eight days in 1968 remain the sole political capital of that generation. In exchange for the abolished student organisations, that had led the demonstrations and appeared to pose a potential danger for the bureaucratic government, the students got the Student Cultural Centre in Belgrade, the Student Centre in Zagreb... and the Student Cultural Centre in Ljubljana. The young people that led and gathered around these centres believed in the subversive, revolutionary power and potential of the arts, which could change not only art and society, but also the world.¹⁰

These students' cultural centres became virtually independent institutions only answerable to the local universities. The Student Cultural Centre (SKC) of Belgrade, was established between 1969 and 1971. The building in which it was located had an interesting history; it had served as the King's Officers Club until 1941 and after 1945 as the Club of the Secret Police. Under the directorship of Petar Ignjatović (1971–5) and Dunja Blažević (1975–9) the SKC grew into a kind of Institute of Contemporary Art. Its programmes met international standards and gained an increasing reputation abroad. The *April Meetings — Expanded Media Festivals*, which were held there from 1972–7, were a forum for the 'new art' from various parts of Yugoslavia, Western 'neo-avant-garde' as well as non-conformist art from Eastern Europe (Poland, Czechoslovakia, etc.).¹¹ The programmes were organised by the SKC staff and financed by Belgrade University. Thanks to its open structure the SKC was able to accommodate all possible contemporary trends in art, film, video, music, theatre and art performance. The Gallery, led capably by successive curators Dunja Blažević during the first years and Biljana Tomić from 1975 onwards, gave artists a venue in which to exhibit and discuss their works. It was a protected space, which, however, had to constantly fight for its programming autonomy and against direct political interference. While at the same time artists elsewhere in the 'East' had to operate clandestinely in the underground, the young artists at the SKC could speak unhindered to their own generation and to interested sections of society. There was, at least in the 1970s, a recognisable desire for congruence between artistic and social experiment. These efforts, nevertheless, did not escape criticism in the local media.

From its beginnings the SKC was a fitting base for artists who subscribed to the 'New Art Practice',¹² like Marina Abramović (b. 1946), Raša Todosijević (b. 1945), Gergelj Urkom (b. 1940), Zoran Popović (b. 1944), Neša Paripović (b. 1942) and Slobodan Era Milivojević (b. 1944). These artists had studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Belgrade with art professors, many of who had been engaged back in the late 1950s in the dismantling of socialist realism and the inception of abstract art in Yugoslavia. The new generation had given up abstract painting immediately after their graduation in 1968–9. Strong individuals in their own right, these artists worked and exhibited together in different configurations, but never formed a distinctly defined group.

Croatia for post-1968 art. The SKC in Belgrade opened in April 1971. The ŠKUC in Ljubljana started work in 1986.

11. *Expanded Media Festivals* were held regularly between 1971 and 1977 during the first week of April, from 10am to 12pm. The programme was conceived by the SKC's programme editors employed by the institution, and the art critic Biljana Tomić who was initially selector for 'expanded' visual arts. Over the eight years of its existence the *April Meetings* hosted Yugoslav and foreign artists, art critics and curators. Among some 200 guests whose work was presented there were: Gina Pane, Theatre of Mistakes, Urlike Rosenbach, Katherina Sieverding, Joseph Beuys, Natalia LL, Achille Bonito Oliva, Klaus von Bruch and Tom Marioni. They were invited to stay in Belgrade during the entire festival so that they could take part in discussions, panels and presentations taking place daily. See the catalogue for the first three years, *Expanded Media 1971-1974*, SKC, Belgrade 1975

12. 'New Artistic Practice' was an umbrella term used by Yugoslav art criticism for various forms of 'new art' that appeared in the country after 1968. See M. Susovski (ed.), *The New Artistic Practice in Yugoslavia 1966-1978* (exh. cat.), Gallery of Contemporary Art, Zagreb 1978; see also *Nova umetnost u Srbiji 1970-1980* (New art in Serbia), Museum of Contemporary Art, Belgrade 1983; and Jasna Tijardović and Zoran Popović, 'A Note on Art in Yugoslavia', in *The Fox*, Vol.1, n°1, New York 1975, pp.49-52

In 1972 Urkom wrote:

It is wrong to think of the six of us as a group working on a joint programme. But the common thread that evidently exists between us points to the fact that we are not just six people with completely diverse interests. One could say it was not so much our attitude towards art that brought us together, it was the closeness of our views that came from similar attitudes towards life. During joint exhibitions and discussions over the past few years we developed a distinct approach to art. Through mutual efforts we managed to establish a common ground, thanks to the fact that the opinions of each of us were important to the others.¹³

What held them together for nearly a decade was their shared opposition against artistic stagnation evident in the academic remnants of socialist realism and the anti-intellectualism, aesthetic formalism and abstract emptiness of 'socialist modernism'. At the time this was the officially sanctioned art in socialist Yugoslavia, widely exhibited both locally and internationally. The six artists disconnected themselves from the conventional requirements of real socialist institutions; they saw their activities as a strategy of subversion, but also as a contribution to the correcting mechanism of Marxist criticism and self-criticism.

The 'New Art Practice', as it was understood at the time, included all kinds of post-object art, conceptual art, process art, land art, video art, body art and performance. 'This new generation,' said Bojana Pejić, one time programme co-ordinator at the SKC, 'introduced the idea of art-as-practice, and instigated the shift from art as "universal language" to art as an "individual language" or as "body as language". They refused the notion of "artistic poetics", which, at least in Serbia, dominated art and criticism, and opted for the notion of an artistic attitude. The artists who interested this generation were Marcel Duchamp and Kasimir Malevich.'¹⁴

The 'New Art Practice' expressed both the positivistic political milieu of the mid-1970s and the artists' genuine desire to create a new art for a new society. They realised that they were representing an alternative. Their art was swaying between idealisation and alienation, criticism, irony and aggression. Mixed with this was a certain longing for a utopian condition, a strong emotional current, which, when it surfaced, revealed a certain sense of tragedy, the knowledge of the possibility of failure.

Radomir Damnjan (b. 1936), a senior member of the circle of artists at the SKC who had previously worked on post-painterly abstraction and hard-edge paintings, created a number of influential performance and photo-works. In his 1973 photo-series *In Honour of the Soviet Avant-Garde*¹⁵ he wore on his forehead, while keeping his eyes closed as if in a dream, the names of the Russian artists El Lissitzky, Ivan Puni, Velimir Khlebnikov and the Brothers Burliuk, as well as the artists Julije Knifer and Piero Manzoni, and the art historian and critic Ješa Denegri. With the choice of these particular names he emphasised their significance. Writing them on his forehead was for him an act of identification with his predecessors, members of a lost avant-garde, and those contemporaries he admired.

The importance of Malevich for artists and students dealing with minimalist concepts was evident in art pieces like that by Gergelj Urkom *Two Sheets of White Paper* 1972. Investigations by artists at the SKC focused on concepts of 'process', 'series' and 'time', as in Zoran Popović's *Axioms* or Urkom's work *Clock* (both 1971), or in the photo series of Neša Paripović, even Era Milivojević's *Taping up* series. In

13. G. Urkom in *Oktober 72*, SKC, Belgrade 1972. New translation in *Dubravka Djurić, M. Šuvaković (eds.), Impossible Histories: Historical Avant-Gardes, Neo-Avant-Gardes and Post-Avant-Gardes in Yugoslavia*, MIT Press, Cambridge 2003, p.561

14. B. Pejić, 'Serbia: Socialist Modernism and the Aftermath', in *Aspects/Positions. 50 Years of Art in Central Europe 1949-1999*, Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, Vienna 1999, p.119

15. J. Denegri, *Radomir Damnjanović Damnjan*, SKC, Belgrade 1973

these works certain conceptual pre-occupations of the Russian avant-garde re-appeared quite naturally, in the metaphoric distance.

Goran Djordjević (b. 1950), was still a student of nuclear physics when he joined the SKC in 1972. He participated in the *April Meetings* of 1973 and 1974 with film and sound projections. He was, to my knowledge, the first artist in Yugoslavia who had addressed in his research the formal and philosophical legacy of Malevich.¹⁶

Djordjević's investigation was based on the principle of mathematical sequencing of specific states and conditions of the square. Through depicting rows of changing formations of squares and movements within those squares, adding and subtracting other geometric elements, like a circle, triangle and line, he described a system for the depiction of the space-time continuum. His *Primeri procesa u kvadratnom sistemu* (*Examples of Processes in the Square System*) 1974 could have been the basis for an animated film. I felt an instant affinity with the work as it seemed closely connected with my own research into Malevich's drawings and their animation for my film *Malevich Suprematism* from 1970–1.¹⁷ In 1977, art historian, Jasna Tijardović, and the artists, Jovan Čekić and Goran Djordjević organised a presentation of Malevich's work, which was later published in the art journal *Umetnost* n° 55. By the end of the 1970s Djordjević started making copies of modern art, including the works of Malevich and Mondrian. In 1980, the art historian Slobodan Mijusković, assistant of Trifunović at the Department of Art History at Belgrade University, published his anthology of texts by Kasimir Malevich translated from the original Russian sources. These were accompanied by texts about the artist written by his contemporaries and by essays pointing towards a contemporary reception of Malevich in the 1970s.¹⁸

The importance of the *April Meeting* of 1974 was underlined by the visit of Joseph Beuys, whom Belgrade artists had first met at the Demarco Gallery in Edinburgh in 1972. He stayed for almost a week at the Hotel Moskva in Belgrade where he regularly met local artists and engaged in daily discussions. At the SKC he lectured on his ideas on the interaction of artist and society and presented the concept of an artistic/anarchistic counter-culture and revolutionary re-interpretation of history. For me two events were of greater importance than the encounter with the German artist; these were performances by Raša Todosijević and Marina Abramović. These artists were amongst the first in Yugoslavia who had evidently discovered the power of the body as medium, as the object and subject of their art. Their energy and internalised aggression became for me the key to understanding the emotional state of artists operating in a sphere of limited tolerance and public indifference. Living and working within a milieu of contradictions they developed an edgy sensitivity and an urge for radical artistic and social transgressions.

Raša Todosijević's performance was called *Drinking Water — Inversions, Imitations and Contrast*. It lasted thirty-five minutes during which the artist drank 26 glasses of water. At the beginning he took a big fish from an aquarium and threw it in front of the audience, which was enveloped by its smell and stared as it struggled to breathe. Eventually the erratic movements of the fish turned into more rhythmic spasms. Synchronising the rhythm of his action with those spasms the artist began to swallow gulps of water. While the fish was dying for lack of water, the artist tortured himself by taking in too much water. Throughout the performance artist and fish were in a dialogue of suffering. Todosijević said: 'Due to the large quantity of liquid in my body I had to vomit periodically over the table in front of me... I had powdered the table with an easily soluble purple pigment and covered it with a white sheet. My plan was to stop the performance as soon as the sheet became saturated with the purple dye due to the outpouring of water.'¹⁹

16. G. Djordjević, V. Radulović *Primeri procesa u kvadratnom sistemu*, SKC Belgrade 1974. It was followed by Goran Djordjević, *Neki elementi analize prostorno-kvalitativnih struktura i procesa*, SKZ, Belgrade 1976

17. *Malevich Suprematism*, producer/director Lutz Becker, Arts Council of Great Britain 1971 (35mm, b&w, 13 min). The film has two parts: an introductory sequence on the concept of suprematism quoting excerpts from Malevich's *Essays on Art* and an animation sequence based on an unrealised concept by the artist from 1927. This film was also shown at the SKC in 1974.

18. S. Mijušković (ed.), *Maljevič — Suprematizam, bespredmetnost (Malevich — Suprematism, Non-objectivity)*, Studenski Izdavački Centar (SIC), Belgrade 1980

19. Quoted in D. Sretenović (ed.), *Thank you Raša Todosijević*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Belgrade 2002, pp. 34–5

Rhythm 5 by Marina Abramović is possibly one of the key seminal works in this artist's career. This was a dramatic event lasting about an hour. In the courtyard of the SKC the artist had laid out a five-pointed star (approximately 6 metres in diameter) made from a wooden frame filled with wood shavings that had been doused in petrol. At nightfall the artist set fire to the frame and started walking around it, cutting off her hair and throwing it into the flames. Then she cut her fingernails and toenails and threw them into the fire. She then entered the inner space of the star where she stood for a while surrounded by flames with her arms stretched wide. She finally lay down fitting her body precisely into the geometry of the star. As the fire was consuming all oxygen the artist lost consciousness. Realising that she was in danger, two of her colleagues, Damnjan and Urkom, entered the star and carried her body to safety. Abramović: 'When a flame touches my leg and I still don't react, two persons from the public enter the star and carry me out. I am confronted with the limits of my body and the performance is interrupted. Afterwards I ask myself how to use my body in and out of consciousness without interrupting the performance.'²⁰ This performance in which the artist staged a specific cleansing ritual seemed to me a kind of exorcism. There was an element of self-sacrifice, which echoed the sacrifices of the generation that had founded Yugoslavia during the war of liberation and the Revolution (1941–5). But the star of the revolution, the guiding star of the parents' generation, was, so it seemed to me, devouring the children of this revolution. This performance provided an insight into the psyche of a generation that had been kept in a state of 'permanent adolescence', politically overruled by the old establishment.

In 1974, the Yugoslav Federation had introduced a new constitution that was seen as a response to the economic and social changes that Yugoslav society had experienced in the past decades. Prior to its implementation, this document was read and discussed by the young generation with some enthusiasm. The Constitution extended the independence of the individual Republics and re-regulated their relationship to central government, converting the structure of the State from a federation to a confederation. It re-defined the role of the president in preparation for a future without the charismatic leader Tito. It further defined the common notion of socialist self-management, which guaranteed the involvement of the Party in decision making and political matters as well as in areas of industrial, agricultural and cultural management. As a personal response, in 1974, Gergelj Urkom developed an addendum, an artists' charter, he called *Proposal for a Comprehensive Society*. It was not published, but the artist presented it in hand-written form at the *April Meeting* of 1975. It states its theses in bold legal language:

Considering that cultural goods express the all-inclusive ramifications of a particular society, it is proposed that the activities of artists and other creative persons embody the constituent principle of a Comprehensive Society. * Proposal etc. as above should be recognised as a fundamental principle of its constituent document. * Sections of the document relating to the arts and other creative fields may not be interpreted or used without an intermediary. * Statements on art and creativity by artists and other creative persons should also be taken into consideration. * These sections can only be elucidated from knowledge and with regard for objectives of contemporary art and thought. * The object of this proposal is to take artistic and other creative activity out of the context of culture onto the level of the 'higher good' of a Comprehensive Society, where it

20. See F. Meschede (ed.), *Marina Abramović*, Edition Cantz, Stuttgart 1993, pp. 48–55

becomes an integral part of a beneficial and socially-cohesive attitude of mind. * As a critical response to this proposal as an artwork the author only accepts a democratic vote.

Urkom's proposal aimed to highlight the unresolved relationship between the individual and the collective, as he later explained: '... to emphasize the humanistic requirements of the individual as opposed to State solutions, so called social mechanisms.'²¹

During the *April Meeting* of 1975 the idea of making a film about the SKC was being discussed. Dunja Blažević succeeded in raising a modest budget from the University. I returned to Belgrade in November with the idea to make an art newsreel. Taking the theme from Dziga Vertov's revolutionary newsreel *Kino Pravda* (*Film Truth*), this production was named *Kino Beleške* (*Film Notes*).²² The title described its informality and ephemeral nature. Filming started with the first days of winter. During shooting and editing I was ably assisted by the artist and filmmaker, Zoran Popović. The form of the film was determined by financial constraints but even more so by the demands of individual participants. For most of them it seemed more important to verbalise ideas and ideological positions than to present their projects visually.

Kino Beleške was a documentary 'about' the SKC in the 1970s, about the artists and intellectuals who shaped the profile of this place, which were at that time all concerned with the idea of art in society. The film is structured as a series of individual statements and/or performances recorded by a primarily static camera. Dunja Blažević, the then director of the SKC, spoke about contemporary art practice, relating it to the principle of socialist self-management, which in the opinion of many contained the potential to fundamentally change the cultural value of art and the artist's role in society. Her statement reflected the political élan with which she fought for the independence of 'her artists', for their acceptance by a wider public and the cultural bureaucracy:

I will talk about the mechanisms for socialising art. In our country there existed so far two ways in which works of art could be financed or bought: publicly or privately. Both are examples of currently dominant property relationships, which reflect clearly the socio-economic basis on which this art came into being, developed, functioned. A third model is being created now; it is the self-management system of free exchange and co-operative work, through work communities, which basically represents a new attitude towards property... In order to develop a new relationship between art and society it is necessary to examine and analyse the existing models of working and behaving... As long as we transport art works from studios into basements and closets, treating them like still-born children, as long as we are creating, through the private market, our own version of petit-bourgeois, we have an art, which is a social appendix, something that does not serve anything or anybody. It is something that is outside our social practice, outside self-management. It is impossible to make new art for a new society on the mental level and with the political instruments of a feudal or bourgeois structure.

In his part, Ješa Denegri, the leading Yugoslav art critic and devoted promoter of 'new art' in Belgrade, on reading his statement, gave a sceptical view of the notion of art as social action. He was critical of artists who thought that changes could

21. G. Urkom, *Proposal for a Comprehensive Society*, SKC, Belgrade 1975. Quoted from a recent conversation with the artist.

22. *Kino Beleške* (*Film Notes*), producer/director Lutz Becker, assistant Zoran Popović, project leaders Dragomir Zupanc and Dunja Blažević, SKZ Belgrade 1975 (16 mm, b&w, 45 min). Participants were Dunja Blažević, Dragomir Zupanc, Jasna Tijardović, Raša Todosijević, Biljana Tomić, Ješa Denegri, Goran Djorđević, Marina Abramović, Slavko Timotijević, Bojana Pejić, Neša Paripović, Goran Trbuljak, Zoran Popović. *Kino Beleške* was shown several times at the SKC and other Student Centres. This film was broadcast nation-wide on Belgrade TV in 1986 on *TV Gallery*, a programme specialising in the visual arts headed by Dunja Blažević. This programme celebrated the *First 15 Years of the SKC*.

be made through an improvement of the internal structure of art language, or worse, a return to the artistic values of the past. What he saw as most necessary was the transformation of the socio-economic base. This would require revolutionary changes.

All break-throughs into new spheres of consciousness have so far remained isolated from the superstructure, having been presented as 'metaphors of freedom', which can act in the limited area of meaning, without reaching the deeper strata of comprehension and consciousness of basic changes that ought to be made on the social level. What can artists do under these historical circumstances? It seems that one of our main tasks should be the affirmation of the primary nature of art: it should reject all mystical, transcendental and formalistic attributes, which have permanently reduced its fragile possibilities for social action... At the same time we should not dwell on the illusion that it is possible to solve this problem at this moment of history. I am quite certain that the well-known methods of assimilating, reformulating, even distorting the meaning of all radical suggestions, applied in the cultural policies of neo-capitalism, as well as the equally well-known response of conformist integration or gradual rejection of our proposals by the cultural policy of 'bureaucratic socialism', will maintain for a long time yet the evident state of crisis in the art, in its inner structure as well as in its social effectiveness.

Goran Djordjević standing silently in front of the camera presented some of his subversive aphorisms as a voice over. Was intellectual peace only a truce? He was aware of the anomalies of modernism and the fragility of artistic freedom:

The character and role of art in a totalitarian society does not represent its degradation, on the contrary, it shows art's true face, which is under other circumstances more or less successfully hidden.

23. *Bez Naziva (Without Title)*, producer/director: Zoran Popović, cameraman: Slobodan Šijan, SKC Belgrade 1976 (16 mm, b&w, 27 min). Participants were artists and critics from Belgrade and Zagreb: Boris Demur, Goran Djordjević, Željko Jerman, Goranka Matić, Nebojša Pajkić, Zoran Popović, Mladen Stilinović, Jasna Tijardović and Raša Todosijević.

24. *Borba u Njujorku (Struggle in New York)*, directed by Zoran Popović, produced by Popović and Tijardović 1976 (16 mm, b&w, 60 min)

He continued:

Art is primarily the result of an illusion of freedom, and not a way of expressing the liberties of man. Every activity, which has the aim to ascertain artistic consciousness represents at the same time the prolongation of that illusion.

Marina Abramović performed a raw first version of her piece *Art is beautiful — the artist must be beautiful*. Combing herself and tearing her hair out in close-up while repeating the phrases 'Art is beautiful — the artist must be beautiful', she criticised prejudices in the common perception of art and the conventional expectations of the public. She followed this with the reading of the programme listing of TV Belgrade for 29 November 1975, the Day of the Yugoslav Republic. The drabness and lack of spirit of this programme gave an illustration of a sense of ideological stagnation and the poverty of the official cultural effort. It illustrated eloquently the cultural alienation and parallel existence in which Yugoslav artists lived.

In 1976 Zoran Popović made his film *Bez Naziva (Without Title)*, which was in its form and content a follow-up to *Kino Beleške*; its subject, art and society, extended

into discussions of art and language.²³ This was followed in the same year by *Borba u Njujorku* (*Struggle in New York*) a film Popović made in New York in collaboration with members of the Art & Language group. It reflected the internal conflicts within the Anglo-American group, the ideological discrepancies between the British and US factions and their magazines *Red Herring* and *Fox*.²⁴ Zoran Popović and Jasna Tijardović were the driving force behind a meeting in Belgrade in October 1975 of members of Art & Language with members of the SKC circle. On that occasion, the SKC Gallery and Museum of Contemporary Art collaborated in publishing a modest publication containing translated texts written by Art & Language.²⁵ During many days of discussions Western artists like Michel Corris and Andrew Menard, whose ideas were based on strict Marxist and Habermasian theory, were confronted with the Yugoslav participant's viewpoints regarding possibilities of a modern art in a socialist society (of the Yugoslav type). These discussions had a rather radical outcome.

As a critical reaction to the annual survey of traditionalist Serbian art entitled *October Salon*, in 1972 the SKC Gallery organised an exhibition entitled *October*. After the success of *October 72* this show was repeated annually. However, in 1975 the Gallery remained closed, but instead issued a publication containing essays dealing with the relationship between art and society, art and the market, and art within the Yugoslav self-management system.²⁶

Being familiar with the SKC programmes and knowing that the artists and intellectuals in its orbit were always interested in questioning the workings of the art system, I proposed to them a project of my own. In early 1976, the Tate Gallery, London, had bought a *Brick* sculpture by Carl Andre. The London press was whipping up scandal. The arguments ranged from the question 'Is it art?' to 'Is a pile of bricks worth more than its material value?' Noisy protest raged on behalf of the taxpayers requesting the return of the work to the artist. I realised that this expression of doubt in the established value system of art would fit into ongoing discussions at the SKC. I collected the front pages, banner headlines and articles of all the papers involved in this controversy and took them to Belgrade where I exhibited them adding translations by Raša Todosijević and a 'reconstruction' of the sculpture made from local mud-bricks.²⁷

One aspect of the ensuing discussions covered the question of a general distrust in the artist, who was (and still is) perceived as an outsider, and art being presumed to be an asocial activity. Despite all efforts in Yugoslavia to take art into society, the relationship between the artists with state institutions and museums fell victim to what was in effect a 'non commercial vacuum'. Internationally acclaimed Yugoslav artists who were identified with the neo-avant-garde found themselves largely excluded from the internal system of art acquisition; a balance between critical and financial recognition was rarely met. Bojana Pejić:

The Yugoslav 'art system'... did not, of course, function on the basis of the market premise; nor was it a system fully controlled by the communist power apparatus. It was a network, established by contemporary art museums whose criteria were founded on modernist notions, originality, respected authorship, and adored works of art in the 'eternal media' of painting or sculpture. In contrast to the Gallery of Contemporary Art in Zagreb, which acquired 'new art' in the 1970s, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade exhibited conceptual artists in group and individual shows from 1973, but failed to provide this art with a proper historic foundation, as it failed to acquire the major works for its collection in time (neither then or later).²⁸

25. See *Art & Language Group*, SKC Gallery and Museum of Contemporary Art, Belgrade 1975. This publication comprises texts by M. Corris and A. Menard.

26. See *October 75*, SKC, Belgrade 1975. The publication includes the following contributions: D. Blažević, 'Art as a Form of Property Consciousness'; R. Todosijević, 'Art and Revolution'; J. Tijardović, 'Notes'; J. Denegri, 'The Language of Art and System of Art'; G. Djordjević, 'Art as a Form of Religious Consciousness'; Z. Popović, 'For Self-management Art'; D. Vukadinović, 'Contribution'; S. Timetijević, 'A Sketch for Possibilities of Art in Self-Management Socialist Society'; B. Pejić, 'Art as a Decorative Authority'; V. Gudac, 'Art as Style'; N. Dimitrijević, 'Art as a Self-conscious System'.

27. Lutz Becker, *Rekonstrukcija skulpture Carla Andrea* (*Reconstruction of a Sculpture by Carl Andre*), SKC Gallery, May 1976. Assistants on the project: Zoran Popović, Raša Todosijević and Ješa Denegri. The participants in the discussion held after the opening on 11 May 1976 were Raša Todosijević, Ješa Denegri, Jasna Tijardović, Neša Paripović and Lutz Becker.

28. B. Pejić, 'Serbia: Socialist Modernism and the Aftermath', in *Aspects/Positions. 50 Years of Art in Central Europe 1949-1999*, op. cit., p.120

The discussion about value judgements within the 'value free' socialist system as opposed to the relation of monetary and artistic values within the capitalist art market still rages. This unresolved problem still contributes to the continuing rejection of this art in the 'West' and its peripheral existence as 'Eastern Art'.

The years of my closest contact with the artists of Belgrade and the SKC were 1973–6. It was a particularly formative period, both for the artists I had the fortune to meet and myself. Many of the ideas, concepts, personal and political relationships under discussion were in the process of becoming. It was a period of growth and spontaneous creativity, nothing seemed to be final or fixed. In singling-out certain initiatives, actions or productions I tried to focus on aspects that seemed to me most symptomatic for the general situation in Belgrade. I am aware that in the 1960s very important artistic developments preceded those in Belgrade, like the formation of Gorgona, New Tendency, etc. in Zagreb, but those would be the subject of a different study. I very much regret not having been able to include in this account four much admired artists from Zagreb who were regular contributors to the SKC *April Meetings*: Goran Trbuljak, Dalibor Martinis, Mladen Stilinović and Braco Dimitrijević. Stilinović, speaking with hindsight, says: 'I have never believed that art has any social function whatsoever... I have never shared this kind of optimism; moreover, to believe that anything of the sort can be achieved in Yugoslavia is and has always been ridiculous. In my opinion ninety percent of art in Yugoslavia reflected that phoney optimism and that is the point of social realism; the issue was not figuration or abstraction, but that fake optimism.'²⁹ The artists discussed in this text belong to the ten percent of those who made a decisive difference, both for themselves and to their society.

I would like to thank Bojana Pejić for her consistent support over many years and for her generous advice during the writing of this text. I would also like to express my gratitude to Dunja Blažević, who provided much valuable information, and to Goran Djordjević, Zoran Popović and Gergelj Urkom, who have helped my memory to overcome serious gaps. In addition I thank Gergelj Urkom for coming up with the title of this text and allowing me to use it.

29. Mladen Stilinović in *Collection of Franciscan Monastery Široki Brijeg* (exh. cat.), Široki Brijeg 1990, p.138

Art Beyond the Art Market

Boris Groys/Anton Vidokle

AV Dear Boris, you recently mentioned to me that you left Russia in 1981, the same year that my family and I left. A couple of years before departing, I had started taking painting lessons at a private artist's studio in Moscow. There was a feeling of underground activity going on in this small class, in part because of its literally underground basement location, but also because of the style of painting we were taught — vaguely modernist and slightly reminiscent of Cézanne. While this was more liberal than the methodologies of existing official art schools and academies, it was of course light-years away from the advanced conceptual art practices that started proliferating in the 1970s and 1980s in Moscow. Was there something like a 'school' for this new type of work? Where did Moscow Conceptualists study?

BG Dear Anton, no, of course, there was not a school for this kind of conceptual art practice in Russia at that time. But I also don't believe that such a school could be found in the West at the beginning of the 1970s — for example, at the time the Moscow Conceptualist circle started. On the other hand, the majority of the Moscow Conceptualist artists of the time already combined visual images and language in their work — long before they began to make conceptual art. Many of them were book illustrators or designers: Ilya Kabakov, Eric Bulatov, Victor Pivovarov, Vladimir Sorokin, Vadim Zacharov. Dmitri Prigov was a sculptor and a poet. Andrei Monastyrsky and Lev Rubinstein were poets and participated in artistic performances. As Western conceptual art became known in Moscow through Western art magazines and catalogues, these artists saw the chance to use their training in this new framework — to redefine their already existing art practices in a new way. You can compare this move to the shift from advertisement to 'high art' that was effected by Andy Warhol. Additionally, structuralism was the dominant intellectual fashion in Russia at that time. That means that it was easy and almost self-evident for Russian artists to perceive art as a kind of visual language.

This also explains the relationship between Western conceptual art practices and the art of the Moscow Conceptualist circle. The acquaintance with Western conceptual art opened Russian artists up to the possibility of using their own art tradition and artistic training in a new way. But it remained the same tradition and the same training — and therefore Russian conceptualist artworks actually look quite different from Western ones. In this sense it seems to me that the use the artist makes of his or her training and education is decisive in the contemporary art context. To a certain degree every kind of education is a readymade — and can be used in very different ways in the art context. The crucial question is, as always: How?

AV So if we are to take education as one of a number of influences that affect an artist's approach, can we still talk about certain models of education that are more productive, whether focused on art or otherwise?

Perhaps if we speak of a 'school' in both senses of the word — both as an educational institution and an affiliation of like-minded colleagues — it becomes useful to think of historical precedents, such as the relationship between New York School artists in the 1950s and 1960s with Black Mountain College, or the experimental painting workshop that Siqueiros taught in New York to a group of expressionist painters, including Pollock. Was there such a connection between artists and institutions in Moscow in the 1960s and 1970s? Or were the artists, like their educational backgrounds, readymades: one day a book designer, the next day a conceptual artist? Did institutions ever provide an unofficial framework for group experiments? In Poland, for example, there was an unofficial group working within the Lodz film academy that used the schools' resources for independent experimental research — their work closely parallels that of North American and European artists like Michael Snow and Chris Marker. Were there any similar initiatives within the official art academies in Russia?

BG No, the independent, unofficial Russian art of that time emerged and developed beyond the official institutions. Partly, the reason for that was the restrictive art politics of these institutions. But, on the other hand, the artists and intellectuals themselves wanted to go away from these institutions, wanted to situate themselves outside them. I remember this time very well. All Soviet things were hated and despised. One did not want to be a part of the Soviet system, did not want to be mixed with 'them'. People wished to demonstrate that they were different, non-Soviet. Art was just one way to become different — to be unlike the others. It was a form of dandyism in the first place. People were not thrown out of the institutions because they made a certain kind of art. They made a certain kind of art just to demonstrate that they didn't belong to the 'Soviet herd'. To do so, one exposed all the conventional signs of 'non-Sovietness': Modern art, the Bible, the *Kama Sutra*, Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, Freud, etc. The Soviet state created a huge reservoir of the forbidden and excluded — and the Russian intellectuals or artists of that time exploited this reservoir as far as they could and were happy about it. They built the networks and circles and black markets that were present in all the major cities of the country. One could live and survive in these networks without having any need to deal with anything 'Soviet'. The majority of unofficial artists of that time were quite satisfied with this lifestyle. Only the circle of the Moscow Conceptualists was unsatisfied, because the members of this circle asked a disturbing question: How does the art production of the unofficial Russian scene look in the international art context?

That means: Moscow Conceptual art was a part of a pretty well-developed unofficial art scene. This scene had its own institutions, traditions, and hierarchies from at least the mid-1950s. But Moscow Conceptualists were at the same time an opposition within the opposition, the outsiders within the community of the outsiders.

Speaking more generally: Every education is based on a certain system of exclusion. If it is said that something is good and something is bad — and any education consists in saying that — then something is always excluded and suppressed. That means every education creates a domain of excluded and forbidden that can be exploited by the students. To exclude or forbid something always means to open new possibilities and opportunities. In this sense, Soviet art education was

very successful, because it created a huge domain of the excluded and forbidden that opened new possibilities for at least three generations of Russian artists.

AV Last December in Ljubljana I had a very interesting conversation with Yuri Leiderman, who told me a little bit about how he initially got involved with contemporary art in Odessa, in the early 1980s. According to Yuri, this had to do with meeting Sergey Anufriev, who was a very flamboyant and charismatic figure then, and who single-handedly tried to start a contemporary art scene in Odessa! Thinking that a 'scene' has to incorporate a number of different types of practices, he assigned various roles among a group of friends, with and without any art background, some of who were supposed to start working with photography, others sculpture or installation. Yuri was designated to be the performance artist within this group, although he was not quite sure exactly what this entailed at the time. Do you think it's possible to speak of this sort of playful, spontaneous collaboration as a sort of art school, albeit one without teachers?

BG The unofficial art scene in Moscow was, of course, much more heterogeneous. But the Moscow Conceptualists also met in the 1970s on a very regular basis to discuss their work and listen to lectures or readings of poetry and prose texts. This was called a 'seminar', and one can say that it worked like a school — especially for the younger artists. Of course, these meetings and discussions were very helpful. But I am not sure that this kind of practice could be generalised.

Russian unofficial artists had no access to Soviet official exhibition spaces and to the media. There was no art market, no spectators from the outside. That means that these artists made their works for colleagues — for other artists, writers, or intellectuals involved in the unofficial art scene. There was almost no competition among the unofficial artists — they built a really utopian community. And an individual artist worked for this community. The contemporary situation is, of course, quite different. Young artists try to get in touch with galleries, with media, with potential collectors as soon as possible. A contemporary artist does not see in other artists the spectators that have to appreciate his or her work. Rather, other artists are regarded as competitors for the attention, for the gaze of a possible spectator. Under these conditions an education through the building of a utopian artistic community seems to me a still desirable but hardly achievable goal.

AV This is very interesting — it makes me think of the Independent Group: Alloway, Paolozzi and Richard Hamilton, and the group that held lectures at the London ICA in the 1950s. Can you tell me a little bit more about these seminars in Moscow — where did they take place? Who organised them? Surely you took part in them?

BG Yes, I took part in them, indeed. The seminars took place in the apartment of Alik Chichko, in the studio of Igor Makarevich, from time to time also in the studio of Ilya Kabakov. The participants were mostly the members of the circle of Moscow Conceptualists. Each seminar began with a lecture or with a presentation of somebody's work. Then the participants reacted with their commentaries and critique. Also, artists or writers of various non-Conceptualist orientations were invited to present their work. These seminars codified and formalised the practice that was already well established in the unofficial art milieu. The artists regularly invited people to their apartments or studios to show new work. Such apartment exhibitions were very popular — and many people came. The poets also organised

readings in private apartments. In some cases only a small group of people was invited. In other cases more than a hundred people came. But even if the attendance was not so big, these readings and shows were frequent, and the work of the unofficial artists quickly became known. Of course, to get access one had to belong, had to be invited or brought along by friends. If one shared some mutual friends with the artist, one could also just call this artist and ask to look at his or her work. In most cases it worked perfectly. In this sense the unofficial art scene was well informed on what was going on. But on the other hand one had to be polite — there was almost no discussion or critique. The seminars tried to compensate for this lack of discussion and to create a forum that could offer the artists and writers an opportunity to discuss their work in a more or less systematic way. The seminars took place every three or four weeks. They were attended by twenty to forty people and not open to the public: one was admitted only by invitation. The seminars started after I moved from Leningrad to Moscow in 1977 and lasted for some time after I left Moscow in 1981.

AV Boris, who organised these seminars? It sounds like there was some structure to them, since there were rules such as having to be invited, etc. It's also interesting that writers and poets took part. The seminars must have been interdisciplinary in nature? What were some of the specific subjects discussed? Coincidentally, in 1977 Joseph Beuys reconstituted his 'Free International University of Creativity and Interdisciplinary Research' at *Documenta*, as a series of public seminars. Was this something discussed in the artists' circles in Moscow?

BG To a certain degree the initiative came from me, because I started my activities in Leningrad and had already participated for a long time in such seminars there. Leningrad's unofficial cultural scene was generally better organised than Moscow's: we had some samizdat magazines in Leningrad like *37* or *Chassy (Watch)* that appeared on a more or less regular basis. But the seminar didn't actually need any specific organisation: people were well connected, they were in regular contact — this was a very close network. So it was very easy to organise people, to bring them together.

The seminar was not really interdisciplinary, because the participating poets and writers were also involved in the visual arts in one way or another. On the other hand, the ideology, and not a profession or a discipline, was decisive. First of all the participants had a common aesthetic programme. It was similar to the situation with the surrealist movement — the borders between artists, poets, philosophers, writers, or filmmakers were less important than the common surrealist programme. And, second, the participants shared a certain political attitude. They were not political dissidents, but they were in a clear cultural, ideological opposition to the official Soviet culture of that time. That produced a certain degree of ambivalence in their attitude to Western conceptual art, which was — at least rhetorically — oriented toward the left. We should remember that all these art movements took place in the more general context of the Cold War. That means: Western leftist politics was seen by Russian artists at that time as being pro-Soviet, as being favourable to the regime that oppressed these artists. On the other hand, Soviet dissidents were seen by the Western left-wing cultural opposition as traitors working at least 'objectively' for the CIA.

The situation was indeed complicated. Conceptual art became the lingua franca of the cultural opposition in the 1970s. This united oppositions in the East and West on an aesthetic level. But their political sensibilities and attitudes were diametrically opposed to each other, because the regimes to which they were

opposed were diametrically opposed to each other. The Cold War split the cultural opposition, including the contemporary art scene of that time, even more radically and uncompromisingly than the dominant regimes themselves. That is why Beuys's political engagement could not find a lot of positive resonance in Moscow during this historical period. Actually, this split between the cultural oppositions of East and West that has its roots in the Cold War is by no means overcome now — and it could be much more persistent than many people expected it to be immediately after the end of the Cold War. After the removal of the communist regimes and the end of the Cold War, the old enmity and distrust were reproduced — using different ideological signifiers — by the former oppositions that now came to power. This process of reproduction through opposition can last for a very long time — longer than people generally imagine.

AV I'm really curious as to what examples you see of this ideological opposition being played out today. Boris, what does this mean for an art school? Does it have to be set up with an inbuilt oppositional structure, or just extremely aware of its various political contexts?

BG It seems to me that left-wing intellectuals and artists from the West were shocked by the readiness of the East European populations to abandon the socialist model and embrace a pretty rough version of capitalism. In recent years I have been repeatedly asked by Western colleagues if East European intellectuals and artists would be ready to join the anti-capitalist movements in the West and in the Third World. I said, 'Yes, some of them are very much anti-capitalist', but I also added that being anti-capitalist means for many people in Eastern Europe being anti-modernist and anti-contemporary-art because modernism and contemporary art are perceived there as the signs of Western capitalist expansion. And that means the sensibilities are still different.

Does it mean that this should be made a topic for education? Rather, it should be made a topic for a discussion. The concept of education presupposes some privileged knowledge that has to be transmitted from the teacher to the students. I don't believe that we can speak about such kinds of knowledge in the context of contemporary art. But, of course, it is useful for an artist to be informed about what happens in the art world and also in the world of politics, theory and cultural studies. The concept of information is usually regarded as being something more profane than a concept of education. But, actually, well-informed people can be pretty inventive and effective — even if and maybe precisely because they are not especially well educated.

AV Actually, this reminds me that virtually all the primary texts used in theory, art history, or studio classes in all the schools I went to in New York in the late 1980s to the early 1990s were basically either directly Marxist (Adorno for example) or very strongly influenced by Marxism, like Foucault. This is interesting because it is taken completely for granted, like air — a kind of a sublimated ideology that underlies all Western contemporary art education.

BG It seems to me that the absolute majority of today's world population believes that today's art is, actually, the art market, that artwork is primarily a commodity and that the art market is simply a specific fraction of the general capitalist economy. Marxism is only a high-cultural, sublime version of this dominant opinion. But

beyond that, the Marxist tradition is also 'critical'. And it is critical in a double sense. It is critical of the authors who think that art is something more than simply a commodity — such authors are treated as being 'metaphysical', 'idealistic', 'naïve', and blind to the economic and political realities of our world. But Marxism is also critical of people who accept the fact that artwork is a commodity — and enjoy artworks as such nice, beautiful commodities. The correct attitude is to think that art is simply a commodity, but to hate this fact. In this respect, the Marxist tradition reproduces on a rhetorically sophisticated level the common-sense opinion that life and, especially, art is actually shit. Adorno is especially good at formulating this evident truth in philosophical language.

But the power of 'critical theory' depends substantially on faith in the power of capitalism itself. You have to believe that capitalism is indestructible, the artwork is always a commodity, etc., to be able to be permanently critical in the Marxist way. Critical theory believes in its own truth, because it believes in the historical stability of the object of its critical analysis. But for somebody who was raised outside of the capitalist regime, a critique of the Marxist type is less attractive because it cannot believe in the all-encompassing power of capitalism. In the Soviet Union the artwork was not a commodity, there was no art market, but art nevertheless took place. Maybe this art was also shit, but it was a different kind of shit that cannot be analysed by the same 'critical theory' that the capitalist shit is analysed.

AV I'd like to bring up Nicosia, the site of our Manifesta school project, as a concluding question. The history of Moscow Conceptual artists in the 1970s and 1980s is an amazing example of how (what you describe as) an opposition within an opposition can push artists to find potential not only in what is excluded and forbidden, but also in a critical reflection on the ideological nature of everyday reality. The Middle East, therefore, would provide interesting circumstances for similar developments — not only are there large areas of exclusion, but also factoring in religion, nationalism, and the legacy of colonialism, which distort the Marxist/capitalist dialectic we all are used to in the West. Can we imagine a present-day advanced educational structure for these conditions — to support a complex oppositional stance in a space that is more committed to 'information' than to 'education', and where the specific dispensation of privileged knowledge of a traditional education model is de-emphasised and its sanctity open to question? I would also be very interested in what critical models you propose in your own classes at the ZKM.

BG The capitalist subject does certain things because he or she is paid for doing these things. Or this subject raises money to be able to do things he or she likes to do. But, of course, one can also do things without being paid for them. Or without being sponsored. In this case we have to do with religion, nationalism, different ideologies, etc. The subject of religion or ideology does things without being paid for doing them. This is already a scandal. To do things unpaid means to be violent — violent against the others or at least against oneself. That is why Soviet art is still excluded from Western art history. It was made outside the art market — and so nobody knows its value. At the same time this art is immediately perceived as being intrinsically violent, as being a kind of secret brainwashing — even if it does look very peaceful. To reflect something beyond the market means to reflect the violence. That means also to reflect capitalism itself as a form of violence — after all, capitalism can only survive because its security is guaranteed by the military and

police. And how to be critical? I don't think that we have to have a specific critical model to be able to be critical — because that would mean that we accept this critical model uncritically. And we actually don't need such a critical model to formulate a critique. Every discourse wants to prove that it is a right and true one. But by doing so it also shows that it is at the same time a wrong and false one. If a discourse would really be a true discourse it would be immediately evident — beyond any additional proofs or explanations, beyond any additional apology. But in reality every discourse wants to situate itself inside a certain discursive field, to show its differences and its similarities in relationship to the other discourses, to explain why it should be trusted, etc. Every discourse — as every artwork — can present itself only by means of such a self-apology. But every apology can be read as a critique. The need for an additional apology already betrays that things are not so obvious as they have to be. Maybe this is precisely the goal of education: to make the students able to read an apology as a critique.

This interview was originally commissioned for a Manifesta publication entitled Notes for an Art School. Anton Vidokle is artist-in-residence at e-flux and co-curator of Manifesta 6.

Moscow Conceptualism

Twenty-Five Years Later

Boris Groys

What can one write about Moscow Conceptualism after so many years? One could of course indulge in reminiscence and write something of a memoir. But who today would find that interesting? Even for the writer of these lines it's not interesting. Better, then, to respond to the assessments of Moscow Conceptualism that the present author has often encountered on his occasional visits to today's Russia. These assessments are basically twofold:

- 1 Moscow Conceptualism is not really conceptualism at all, since it is not like standard Anglo-American conceptual art, such as is represented by the group Art&Language or the artist Joseph Kosuth.
- 2 Moscow Conceptualism was a reaction to the Soviet regime and to the specific situation of the artist under this regime. With the collapse of this regime, Moscow Conceptualism lost all of its meaning, since it remained entirely within its own era, namely, the Soviet era.

And now, my response:

¹
No, Moscow Conceptualism does not resemble Anglo-American conceptual art. This assertion, in fact, opens my article 'Moscow Romantic Conceptualism' from 1979, where I explain the difference between these two phenomena. But of course, one might very well ask why, if these phenomena are so different, do they share the same name? The answer is simple. In itself, Anglo-American conceptual art represents only one variant in the conceptualist currents that spread throughout the world in the 1960s and 1970s. These currents are usually considered to include the work of the Belgian artist Marcel Broodthaers, the Italian Giulio Paolini, and the Brazilians Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica, as well as a great many other artists of this period. All of these artists are quite different in their work methodology, in the materials they use, and in the style, aesthetics and ideology of their artwork. But they are all united by a general conceptualist concern, namely, their interest in the relationship between image-making and language. For centuries, images and text were considered to be essentially different media. In the modernist era, the opposition between language and image-making dramatically intensified. Artists strove to free themselves from any association with literariness, narration, content or ideology. They strove to create things that could only be looked at — things that could not be conveyed in words. At the same time, modernist literature strove to free

itself from all that was pictorial, from all descriptiveness; it strove to become 'pure text'. Conceptualism, on the contrary, understood visual art as a special kind of language, and it understood text as a kind of image-making. We can speak about conceptualist strategies in all those cases where the opposition between picture and text, and between object and language, has been eliminated. Clearly, this is precisely what interested the Russian — the Moscow — artists and poets of the 1970s, such as Kabakov, Bulatov, Chuikov, Prigov, Rubinstein and Monastyrsky. We are, then, fully justified in calling these artists conceptualists.

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But what, in fact, do picture and text have in common? This common element appears with the greatest clarity when both picture and text function on an equal basis within the context of the anonymous communication systems that characterise our age. A robot, sent to Mars today, can take a picture, create images, and transmit them to a computer on earth, which then analyses these images, compares them with other images, preserves them in its memory, and makes the corresponding conclusions. Here we have a functioning model for the entire art system, including the artist, the curator, the gallerist and the art critic. In our present age, the individual human being no longer holds a monopoly on the creation of either pictures or texts. And it is precisely this circumstance that allows him to eliminate the opposition between image and text, for he no longer has to ask himself, which am I — writer or artist? In the context of our contemporary anonymous communication systems this question is simply irrelevant. Commercial design and commercial advertising are part of these anonymous systems. But they also include the system of representing politics in the media — by means, indeed, of texts and images. The Soviet system was one such system of the medial representation of politics. This system is no longer with us, but it has been replaced by other systems that nonetheless function along the same principles. In such matters, everything is decided by technology, and the technology of medial representation has changed far less than we are accustomed to believe. Consequently, the position of the artist in relation to the anonymous machinery of the production, distribution and consumption of texts and visual products has itself remained basically the same as before. The momentous event occurred in the 1960s — this was when the individual author lost his monopoly on the production of both visual images and texts. Conceptualism, in its various forms, was a reaction to this event. This event is irreversible. It is no longer possible to restore the traditional figure of authorship, inasmuch as there are no technological premises for such restoration. It is, therefore, obviously premature to speak today of surmounting conceptualism. The contemporary artist, that is, the post-conceptual artist, has ceased to be an artisan producer of texts and images, such as artists and writers were in the pre-conceptualist era. The contemporary artist is, rather, a consumer, analyst and critic of the images and texts produced by contemporary culture. And this role for the contemporary artist is unlikely to change anytime in the immediate historical age.

A Short History of OHO

Igor Zabel

The OHO group can be described as the most interesting and important neo-avant-garde art movement in Slovenia in the 1960s. Its history is not very long, but it is extremely rich and complex. OHO has gone through many phases of development. Practically all the essential aspects of its work have changed or modified: members, ideas, principles of organisation and artistic practice. And yet one can also say that this development is coherent and logical.

Periodisation

The history of OHO is usually divided into three main periods. Tomaž Brejc, who collaborated with the group as a critic and writer and who wrote the first, and still important comprehensive historical overview of OHO, described these periods according to the type of art the group members produced. According to him, the first is the period of reism, during the second period the artists were involved in activities connected to Arte Povera, land art, body art, process art, conceptual art etc., and he invented the term 'transcendental conceptualism' to describe OHO's activities in the third period. On the other hand, Marko Pogačnik, a leading member of OHO, divides OHO's history according to the structure of the collective itself. According to Pogačnik, OHO was first a broad movement, then a limited group of artists, and eventually a community. These two historical approaches are not in contradiction; rather, they are precisely parallel. Changes to the collective structure of OHO corresponded to changes in the artistic interests and practices of its members. The first OHO period lasted from 1966 to the end of 1968, the second from early 1969 to 1970, the third from 1970 to 1971, when the group decided to abandon art as an isolated field, separate from life.

The Pre-History of OHO

OHO also has an interesting pre-history that is important to its ideas and activities. It started when three high school students, Marko Pogačnik, Iztok Geister and Marjan Ciglič, became editors of the Kranj High School newspaper, *Plamenica* (*The Torch*). The first issue they prepared and published in 1963 included only texts and visual works by the three editors — experimental texts, abstract drawings, etc. The issue caused a scandal. Not only the teachers and the school administration, but also the local Communist Party representatives reacted very nervously. And yet, the scandal also had some positive consequences. The most important was the fact that several people involved in innovative artistic and cultural activities became interested in the editors of *Plamenica* and started to collaborate with them. Among them were Naško Križnar, who — although a little older than Ciglič, Geister and Pogačnik — belonged

Editors' Note

Igor Zabel wrote this text on the OHO group at our request to place the group's activity into an international framework. In this respect, it is, as far as we know, a pioneer work. Given the fact that we received the final version of the text about a week before Zabel's premature death, it is, at the same time, probably also the last text in his prolific output, which is of immense significance to Slovenian art and will no doubt be hard to replace. In view of the above we have decided to publish this substantial extended essay in its entirety.

to the same generation; the poet Franci Zagoričnik and the writer Rudi Šeligo. Zagoričnik was important as a leading representative of visual and concrete poetry in Slovenia. Šeligo was a writer who was, at that time, gradually developing a particular approach based on the French *nouveau roman*; Križnar had been interested in film. So the core of the so-called Kranj Group was formed. The scandal with *Plamenica* also attracted the attention of the circle around the magazine *Perspektive* (*Perspectives*), at that time the leading cultural and literary magazine in Slovenia. The connection with this circle also proved to be important for the later development of OHO.

The Kranj Group was not organised in any formal way. Rather, it was a group of friends and collaborators who tried hard to develop an innovative and experimental artistic activity in the city of Kranj, although they did not find much response in this industrial and culturally rather conservative city. They were particularly active in the years 1964 and 1965, but later, due to a lack of interest and possibilities, they moved most of their activities to Ljubljana. The Kranj Group was the basis of the future OHO. But the OHO movement became possible only after several other groups and individuals made contact with the Kranj Group members. Among them there were people who belonged to the so-called 'hooligan' movement; e.g. the poet and philosopher Aleš Kermavner (due to his suicide, the collaboration with him lasted only a few months, but it was important for the future OHO) and Milenko Matanović, who became an important member of OHO. At that time, the word 'hooligan' was commonly used as a derisive expression for young people who were behaving and dressing unconventionally, especially those with long hair. Hooliganism was then, in fact, a movement among young people who felt a deep discontent with the de-humanised society, especially with the beginnings of the consumerism that started to develop in Yugoslavia in the second half of the 1960s. They understood their unconventional and provocative behaviour as a form of protest against such dehumanisation, and hoped they would find a more direct and sincere form of expression in the pop and rock culture of the time.

Some of the younger collaborators of the *Perspektive* magazine were also important for OHO. When Pogačnik and Geister began their studies in Ljubljana in 1963, they also found, or renewed, contact with the circles around the magazine. Among the collaborators were, for example, the poet Tomaž Šalamun and Braco Rotar who at that time wrote fiction, but later collaborated with OHO as art critic and theoretician. This generational movement began during a period of crisis, in a time when political repression was relatively strong and the possibilities for creative work limited, especially after the authorities cancelled the *Perspektive* magazine. Gradually, former collaborators with *Perspektive* joined another magazine, *Problemi* (*Issues*). The young generation had another opportunity, the (originally rather dull and official) newspaper of the Union of Students, *Tribuna* (*Tribune*). It is extremely interesting to observe how, in just a few years, these two periodicals were transformed into complex, experimental, challenging and very informative papers. The anthology called *EVA*, initiated by Tomaž Šalamun, edited by Plamen and Pogačnik, and published in 1966, was perhaps the first strong collective statement of the new artistic generation and also the first in the important series of OHO books.

Reism

An interesting question is, when did the pre-history of OHO end and the history of OHO in the proper sense of the word begin? Quite often, the beginning of OHO is connected with the publication of the book *OHO* by Plamen and Pogačnik, and to the untitled text they wrote on that occasion and which is now often called 'The OHO

Manifesto'. To start the official history of OHO with these two publications is appropriate, at least for the reason that the word OHO appeared here for the first time. However, we should take into account at least two important aspects. First, 'The OHO Manifesto' is actually not a manifesto in the usual sense of the word. It does not declare the beginning of a new movement and its main aims and principles. It is very important for understanding the ideas of the OHO members, and particularly for understanding the concept of reism, but it was obviously not intended as a declaration of a programme. And secondly, the appearance of the book *OHO* and the publication of the 'OHO Manifesto' were not radically new steps, but rather a continuation of a rich and interesting activity that had started already in 1965, in some respects even earlier, and which had clearly reached the form of a connected, albeit plural and heterogeneous movement. The process of forming such a movement included three essential aspects. As for the members, their number gradually increased, while it was becoming more obvious who actually belonged to the core group. As for the different OHO practices, the members developed the most important approaches and fields of interest in 1965 and 1966. And, what was perhaps essential, the development of the theory of reism offered a firm basis and guideline to these diverse practices. Therefore, it seems to make sense to present briefly the main ideas of reism.

The notion, based on the Latin word *res* (thing), was coined by the critic and philosopher Taras Kermauner, who first used it in an essay on Tomaž Šalamun's poetry. The idea of reism was then further developed, especially by Iztok Geister and Marko Pogačnik, who became the main ideologists of the OHO reism. They accepted the notion not only as the name for a new artistic movement, but as the designation of a complex, theoretically based system which does not only define a specific aesthetic and approach in art, but also affects even the smallest details of everyday life.

The basic concept of the first (reistic) OHO period is therefore that of 'the thing'. We should understand this notion as essentially different from the 'object'. An object is always determined by the subject — object relationship. It is, therefore, determined by human notions and practical needs. Because of this, the independent being of things as autonomous entities remains hidden, and so does the richness of their qualities. To discover things means to discover their radical independence from man and their own, autonomous being. The reistic relation to things was based on an attentive looking into the world, a fondness for surprising details and a love for a peculiar reistic paradox. The basic attitude towards the world was a looking-at, a vision, which was extremely attentive and which was not internally hierarchic. The reists thus wished to reach a kind of mirror consciousness that reflected the things, or, more precisely, their appearance and factuality regardless of the hierarchical and functional relations and meaning projected by man into the world of things. However, this does not mean that the reistic consciousness was inwardly undifferentiated; quite the opposite, noting the differences was essential to the reistic attitude. But these were differences in the appearances of things, differences in forms, colours, scents, tactile qualities, etc. These are the very differences, which define the thing as it is. Briefly, for such a consciousness there was no difference between a man and an empty bottle, except the difference in their appearance. The reistic man was therefore determined as a viewer; however, this position was no longer a privileged one, as it used to be in the humanist world. As there was no hierarchic difference between man and other things, man stared at the things, but the things also stared at him. The subject — object relationship has lost its hierarchic meaning, as it has become general and mutual. All different reistic activities may thus be understood as a path leading to such a reistic consciousness.

Also the avant-garde impulse of OHO, that manifested itself in aesthetic and social provocations, acquired a particular meaning in the context of reism. It was understood as a way to point out the differences and the reality usually hidden under conceptual and functional conventions. It was here that reism came close to so-called hooliganism. However, while the hooligan movement involved a strong existentialist element of dissatisfaction with the developing consumer society, and of protest against it, reism aimed primarily towards an open and attentive approach to the world and not a social or even political protest. Reists, therefore, understood the unconventional clothes of the hooligans primarily as a way of turning attention towards the fact that not only caps exist, but also different caps (i.e. they wished to stress the individual features that would normally disappear in the generic notion); and they interpreted the hooligan's existentialist protest as a sign of dissatisfaction with the world in which man's interests claimed things and superimposed a will upon them. Reism therefore — unlike most of the avant-garde movements — did not begin with a project of changing the world, it just wanted to change consciousness and transform it into the permanently open and attentive reistic vision. Reists had no intention to destroy museums, they just wanted to change the museum's context so that it would break with established conventions and throw light onto things as they are (and this is the case not only with the museum but with any institution). For OHO, the point is not in changing the world, it is only necessary to see it. This also explains the deliberately un-political attitude of OHO.

People's Culture

The different approaches and procedures developed by the OHO members were closely connected to the idea of the thing and to the reist mission to persuade people to look at the world around them in a different, more immediate and committed way. They were also related to their idea that attentive observation should not be limited to the world of art, but rather expanded to the world at large. This is why they aimed to develop an approach that would be essentially popular. The idea of a popular creativity implied, first, that things should not be divided into common and precious, since they are all equally things and equally beautiful in their particular qualities; second, that creative process should not be understood as something that should become an integral part of everyday activities for everyone; and, third, that the reception of art should be integrated into the attentive observing of the world. Perhaps we could say that for reists art had a particular enlightening function. They thought it could help people to develop their attention and their relation to the world, but they also believed that it should be completely integrated into the everyday world and not isolated into any particular area.

Their interest in making art popular is quite obvious from their efforts and ideas. An excellent example is Marko Pogačnik's idea (described in his manifesto-like *Proposal*, published in 1965) of a new type of exhibition space he called *Sintgalerija* (*Synthgallerie*). This would be a simple construction that could be installed in public spaces, anywhere where many people pass by. He thought that this type of exhibition space would be most appropriate for reistic works. The name of the project comes from the idea that new art should aim at a 'synthesis of the visual experience', i.e. at the re-integration of art and visual experience into everyday life.

Further evidence of reistic interest in popular art was the interest of OHO members in forms of popular culture, in simple materials, and in everyday situations, especially in urban public spaces, that became the space of their activities, but also for the presentation and distribution of their work. It is interesting to notice how they

understood the pop art movement. Of course, in the mid-1960s they still did not have complete information about pop art's activities and ideas, although both the art world and the popular media offered a variety of information about the new movement. Furthermore, we should take into account the differences between the American situation with the developed consumer society and the situation in Yugoslavia, where a mild form of consumerism started to develop only in the mid-1960s. Pop art (as far as OHO members knew it in the mid-1960s) was thus one of the motivating forces behind OHO activities (e.g. Pogačnik's plaster casts are also partly connected to Segal's plaster sculptures), but the OHO members understood it literally as 'popular' art. In 1964, Pogačnik wrote an article about pop art, where he interpreted it as art that belongs to everyday life (characteristically, the title of the article was 'People's Culture'). In Pogačnik's opinion, such 'popular' art was produced and consumed immediately among people and was not isolated into a secluded and élitist area of high art and thus represented a possibility to make true a 'popular thinking of the world'. Such understanding was perhaps connected also to OHO artists' enthusiasm for American folk music, for the type of singers of whom Dylan was maybe the best example.

Pop-Items

Reistic ideas are especially evident in the concept they invented to replace the traditional notion of the work of art. The material objects they produced were called 'artikli' (items) or 'pop artikli' (pop items). 'Artikel' (item) was the word used in the mid-1960s — at the time when certain elements of the free-market system and consumer society started to develop within the context of the socialist system — to designate the mass-produced consumer objects; the prefix 'pop' referred to Pogačnik's specific understanding of pop art as a truly popular or people's art.

The word 'artikel' also includes the word art that refers to the artist's, as well as the artisan's way of working. An 'item' therefore connects the world of everyday consumerism with the world of art; with it, art enters into everyday life, and everyday life enters into art. This was a kind of double twist by the OHO reists; precious works of art were turned into 'items', but at the same time, every single thing (represented by mass-produced consumer objects) was dignified as something worthy of contemplation and admiration. For them, a simple button was worth no less contemplation and admiration than any work of art.

Reistic 'items' did not spread around themselves an aura of being precious, unique objects, attainable only to an élite. They were things among things. The artists used cheap materials and very often mass production techniques (printing, impressing, casting), the basis for the 'items' were often very usual everyday objects; they also used mass-culture forms such as comic strips. Presentation and distribution was also in accordance with this. 'Items' were cheap, so literally anyone could afford them. Therefore, the artists often offered their item for sale on markets, in shops, on the streets, etc. instead of trying to present them in the exclusive gallery context.

Since the reistic ethic understands the humanist approach to the world as appropriating and repressing things, a reist work had to minimise, or, if possible, exclude any expressive dimension. An 'item' is an independent thing, not a vehicle of the artist's thoughts and emotions. Methods of printing, impressing, casting, etc. were very appropriate to ensure the un-expressiveness and impersonal nature of reist works, as they excluded the expressive touch of the artist's hand. If the hand, in spite of everything, appears, it is only an imprint like all the others, a thing among other things.

Similarly, subjective arbitrariness in arranging and constructing works had to be excluded. Here, the OHO artists used two seemingly contradictory strategies;

rational programming, and coincidence and play. The rational programming of works gained great importance, since it excluded artist's subjective expressive will and replaced it with an abstract logical or mathematical matrix (sequence, permutation, etc.) that defined the structure of the work. Programmed work (appearing as a text, visual poem, film, installation or a mere concept) was one of the basic OHO ideas. Nevertheless, we have to mention the opposite pole of rational programming, the principle of coincidence, play and game. The element of 'ludism' — a concept also introduced by Taras Kermauner — played an important role in OHO activities. One might even say that a strictly programmed work includes the element of play, as the rational programme can be taken as a set of rules for a game.

Series

The basic idea of the series is that by seeing a number of objects that all belong to the same generic notion we become aware of the differences between them and are thus able to see them as individual and separate things. The main paradox of this shift lies in the idea that, in everyday life, we are used to replacing the actual perception of things with their generic notion, and this notion is the expression of the subordination of the world of things to our use and to the meanings we give them. It is by multiplying objects of the same kind that we are made aware of their completely individual nature.

This tension between a generic notion and a variety of individual phenomena that could all be described by that notion was often present in 1960s art. We could compare the reistic series with two examples of such works. The members of OHO knew neither of them, yet they show some striking similarities in their approach. One of them is a work by John Baldessari with the self-explanatory title *The Back of All the Trucks Passed While Driving from Los Angeles to Santa Barbara, California, Sunday 20 January 1963*. This series of 32 pictures, one of the first important works by Baldessari, shows an unusual parallel with reistic approaches with its almost obsessively systematic approach and with the strong interest in the usually overlooked everyday reality. (The approach in this work is also very close to Ed Ruscha's books that began with the *Twenty-Six Gasoline Stations* in 1963.) Nevertheless, there are also obvious differences between both types of series. Reists worked with the most immediate everyday context, and deliberately with the smallest items, such as buttons. They combined systematic strictness with humour and poetry, trying to personalise individual items, e.g. by giving them individual names. On the other hand, we can understand Baldessari's context of car travel, of passing time on a motorway (in the series of photographs we can follow the changes in daylight) as clearly American. What is less obvious in Baldessari's work (but, as his later pieces show, nevertheless implicitly present) is the interest in the semantic structures that connect different items to the same notion. It is this aspect that the other work I would like to mention here, Peter Weibel's *Stiegenhaus* from 1967, deals with. Weibel confronted the word 'Stiegenhaus' (staircase) with 27 views of different staircases, thus illustrating the relation of the abstract and the concrete. Weibel's project could be understood as a response to Kosuth's propositions, particularly the *One and Three Chairs* 1965. Kosuth confronted an actual chair with its photographic image and the dictionary definition of the chair. On the other hand, Weibel is not interested only in the relation of the actual object to its representation and the notion, but with the construction that subsumes a rich variety of actual phenomena to a single abstract notion. In a very similar direction, the reistic idea was to deconstruct language in order to make the individual features of different things visible.

The connections of the concept of the series with structuralist theories are perhaps most obvious in a short text written by IG Plamen and later titled 'The Manifesto of Seriality'. In this short, but very dense text, Plamen claims that the world 'has been caught in a net' and this net has been 'the scheme of the basic structure of the world'. This net can be described with the following formula:

ABC

ABC

ABC

The vertical axis (AAA) represents equal things, the horizontal axis (ABC) stands for different things. This scheme corresponds exactly to structuralist ideas (as found, e.g. in Jakobson) of the two basic axes of language, the paradigmatic and the syntagmatic axis. What seems to be the most essential connection between reistic ideas and structuralism is that the basis of existence and identity is difference. For Plamen, the 'scheme of the basic structure of the world' is primarily a network of difference, just as Saussure defines language as a system of differences. The function of art, according to Plamen, is 'to create order in which the *differentia specifica* becomes visible'. This, however, is only possible if art abandons the aim of depicting the world.

The OHO Movement in the Space of Mixed-Media

In its first period, OHO was not a 'group' but a 'movement'.¹ Its membership was not very strictly limited, and it accepted different initiatives. There was a group of people we could describe as core members of OHO. Marko Pogačnik and IG Plamen were certainly two central personalities. As they transferred the majority of their activities from Kranj to Ljubljana, the circle of their collaborators also changed, although they, for some time at least, remained connected to the people with whom they formed the Kranj Group. There was, however, no formal framework for their activities, not even after the name OHO appeared. Rather, OHO in that time functioned as a network of ideas and initiatives of a relatively broad group of people, connected with similar ideas as well as personal friendship. OHO was not based on a formal membership, but on an idea of synergy. This means that an action or an idea could simply be accepted as OHO, if it was compatible with it. The personal structure could be described as a net with some permanent and more outspoken members, with their close collaborators, with people who kept their individual positions, but nevertheless joined their activities with OHO, at least for a certain period, with friends who enjoyed taking part in actions, although did not really contribute any essential idea, with people who followed OHO's activities from a distance and only joined them occasionally etc. This synergy formed a constant flow of diverse actions, happenings and other activities that were all perceived as OHO.

Members and friends of OHO were writers and poets, visual artists, filmmakers, critics and theorists; its character was, therefore, one of 'multi-media' or 'inter-media'. (In fact a lot of OHO works represent a 'medial form' between different arts or genres.) The range of OHO activities was thus very wide; it included poetry, visual and concrete poetry, OHO Editions, visual works ('items'), films, happenings, etc.

Because of this type of collective creativity, 'actions' and 'happenings', especially in public spaces, represented an essential part of OHO's activity. Their public actions in the urban context started in 1966 and 1967. Probably the first event that was explicitly called a 'happening' was organised in late 1966 by Pogačnik. It took place in a closed space (people gathered in a room and produced sound with different objects), but Pogačnik published an announcement in the students'

1. Perhaps the first to use the term 'OHO movement' was Bora Ćosić in his article 'Pokret OHO u prostoru mešane tehnike (mixed-media)' (The OHO Movement in the Space of Mixed-Media), published in the short-lived, but very interesting Belgrade magazine *Rok* n°1, 1969. p.4. The title of his article is used as the title of the present chapter.

newspaper *Tribuna*, inviting people to join the event. The majority of happenings and actions were organised in 1968, mostly in the Zvezda Park in the very centre of Ljubljana. Actions were often planned only in broad outlines and also included improvisation and the spontaneous collaboration of participants. Passers-by were not only observers, but were often invited to take part in these events.

The OHO visual artists of that time were Marko Pogačnik, Milenko Matanovič and Andraž Šalamun (a little later, David Nez joined them). Pogačnik especially developed an intense and consequential reistic production; it includes drawings, 'pop items' (plaster boards with casts of different objects, later also three-dimensional casts of objects, e.g. small plastič bottles) and perhaps the first installation in Slovene art (an environment with a sculpture and mirror, installed in an exhibition in Kranj in 1965). Pogačnik and Geister together produced witty comic strips and books in which text, drawings and graphic design form an inseparable whole.

Literature (above all, poetry) played an important role at that time. OHO poetry can be generally divided into two streams. The first is the so-called 'topographic' (i.e. concrete and visual) poetry; its main representative, as a writer and theorist, was Franci Zagoričnik, while topographic poetry was written also by Matjaž Hanžek, Milenko Matanovič, Iztok Geister, Marko Pogačnik, Naško Križnar, Vojin Kovač-Chubby and others. Visual poetry undoubtedly conforms to the principles of reism in its understanding of the text not as a medium through which the reader has to grasp the message, but as an independent self-identical entity. A typographic sign, for example, which normally disappears in the word and its meaning, becomes important for its own sake and attracts our complete attention. The other current of OHO poetry could be named reistic in a narrower sense of the word. It includes, for example, factual description of everyday objects (e.g. descriptions of preservatives in a text by Vojin Kovač-Chubby) or appropriation of texts, real (as in Tomaž Šalamun's text *Jonas*, composed completely from different ready-made texts) or just simulated. A particularly consequential and interesting type of reistic poetry was developed by the leading theorist of the OHO movement, Iztok Geister (IG Plamen). He was writing characteristically minimal poetry based on word play and the various possible free relations between words and their meanings. The difference between IG Plamen's poetry and the above-mentioned works is based on his initial perception that 'the things in the world are not the same as the things in poetry'. Reism searches for the mere, meaningless appearance of things. But the word — because of its very nature — cannot be separated from the meaning, a 'mere word' does not exist. He stressed that the sense of his poetry lies 'in finding mutual relations of the meanings of the written words. I stress, relations of meanings, since the relations of words are indeed only existential relations. Grasping the meaning of a word means nothing other than its relation to another word.'

Perhaps the most interesting achievement of this period was the specific OHO book. Of course, it also, followed the basic demands of reism. A book is usually understood as a mere vehicle for a text and, so to say, disappears when we read it; an OHO book, on the other hand, is designed in such a way that the text does not have a privileged position; the text is only one of the elements of which the book consists, and it is the book itself which is now the object of our attention.

The OHO books appeared as a part of the so-called OHO Editions. This series started in 1966 with Pogačnik's *Item Book* and Pogačnik's and Geister's *OHO*. Most books were published in 1967 and 1968. OHO Editions included books of a very different nature. Some of them were quite straightforward collections of poetry with illustrations; in others (as in the book *OHO*) the relations of texts, images and pages

became more complex. In later editions there was a strong tendency towards deconstruction of the text. The so-called 'book on the ring' presents only one or two letters of text on a single page. Some books have no text at all. Edition OHO continued with the topographic series and the series of small boxes that, in most cases, contain a number of paper cards with texts, images, imprints of different objects, etc. Besides books and boxes, OHO Editions also included other items, such as a tape with two songs by Križnar, Matanović and Plamen, several series of matchbox labels, etc.

We could, of course, count the books of the OHO Editions among so-called artists' books, and recently they have indeed been presented in this context several times, not without reason. The Fluxus artists have been particularly important in this respect. On the other hand, the books produced by Ed Ruscha since 1963 have been recognised as pioneer works in the field of artists' books. We could therefore see that the OHO books coincided with the pioneering efforts of artists working with books and prints. (For example, Ruscha published his famous work *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* in 1966.) Already in the late 1960s and early 1970s, such printed matter had been recognised as a particular art form, called book art and later, after the title of a 1973 exhibition in Philadelphia, *artists' books*, a term that has since then been generally used. However, we should keep in mind that the books and other editions from OHO Editions were not meant as an attempt to develop a new art form (e.g. book art). Rather, they were developed independently, as a result of the application of the reistic theory on the traditional medium of the book, putting the medium in the place of the subject of the work. In a sense, the OHO book could also be understood as an expansion of the idea of visual and concrete poetry from a single text to the book as a whole.

Photography had a dual role in OHO's first period. They used it for documentation of their actions and projects, but also for particular, photography-based works they called 'photo-projects'. These were works that existed in the form of photography, often as a series of such images. The aesthetic qualities of the photographic image were not important. OHO members were interested in the possibilities of photography to transpose a certain situation into a new context and thus give it a new meaning (Tomaž Šalamun and David Nez made several photographs presenting certain situations that they called sculptures) as well as in the possibilities to develop a — as we could perhaps call it — structural approach in photography.

OHO films must also be mentioned here. Films were present in all periods of OHO's work. The list of OHO films, compiled by Naško Križnar, includes (besides documentation of OHO's actions and projects) around 40 short films that were shot from 1964 to 1970. They were mainly made by Naško Križnar (who also documented several OHO projects, happenings, etc.) and Marjan Ciglič; but Geister, Pogačnik, Nez, Matanović and others also worked occasionally with film. In a similar way to literature, we can trace two complementary tendencies here. The film camera often functions as a representative of the reist attentive eye, which notes and contemplates things; some of these works demand quite a lot of discipline from the audience. On the other side, OHO films also explored the interior possibilities and the nature of the medium itself; films of this kind are not 'transparent' any more, nor do they 'represent' the eye, but instead become 'things' themselves. Some of Križnar's films, for example, have a severe rational structure (some of them even consist only of written texts) and are thus things in a similar sense to a topographic poem. We should also mention projects (among them, Križnar's film *Beli ljudje* (*White People*) is certainly the most characteristic) that could be understood as a kind of film

equivalent to a happening. As for the documentary films, it is important to say that they are often more than just a document. The film camera often offers the only possibility to transmit an action to the audience (the action would otherwise be limited only to its participants and would lose the dimension of communication, essential for art); sometimes such a project even includes the camera as an integral part (this is certainly the case with some conceptual projects from the 1970s).

Reism as Post-Humanism: Sources and Contexts of OHO's Reism

Reism could be described as a vision of a non-humanistic or non-anthropocentric world where the traditional relationship between man (as the subject) and things (his objects) would be replaced by equal and mutual relations between things as individual and particular entities. In the humanistic and anthropocentric world, the things 'disappear' in their function and meaning imposed by men. A reist, on the other hand, primarily notices and observes things as they are, enjoying their differences and the very fact that they exist. For a reist, there is no hierarchical difference between things; they are all exactly on the same level.

Although an original conceptual and aesthetical system, reism in fact belongs to a broader context that could perhaps be described as post-humanism. The main characteristics of the diverse tendencies and ideas that could be described by this term is the replacement of the anthropocentric idea of the world and of the classical notion of the subject with structures where the position, activities and even consciousness of man are just elements determined by broader defining structures. The new value of the thing can be a part of such changed concepts, but it was also connected to those philosophical tendencies that researched the human condition in the contemporary world, confronted with new forms of production and consumption.

The concept of reism was, to a certain extent, a response to a variety of ideas and approaches that Geister and Pogačnik could find in different sources, in books, magazines, and in personal contacts. Among these sources are phenomenological and existentialist philosophy, structuralism, post-structuralism and semiotics, the ideas of the French *nouveau roman*, and Marxist and neo-Marxist ideas, especially those that dealt with the issues of alienation and reification (there was a strong neo-Marxist movement among Yugoslav philosophers of the 1960s who were interested in the ideas of young Marx, and especially the theory of alienation).

Geister and Pogačnik mentioned several times that they were reading texts by philosophers such as Heidegger, Wittgenstein and Husserl at the time they developed their ideas of reism. Tomaž Brjc, for example, pointed to the similarities between the style of Plamen's and Pogačnik's reistic texts and the language of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*.² Husserl's writings, stressing the necessity of going back 'to the things themselves', seem to be an obvious reference for reism. (However, we should not forget the fundamental differences in understanding the idea of the 'thing' in phenomenological transcendental philosophy and in the theory of reism.)

The interest in the approaches and ideas of the *nouveau roman* was also relatively strongly present in intellectual circles in Slovenia in the 1960s. Magazines such as *Perspektive* and *Problemi* published articles about new French writers and their ideas. They also introduced Lucien Goldmann's specific interpretation of the *nouveau roman*, based on the Marxist concept of reification. It is not a coincidence that Rudi Šeligo, who was close to the future OHO members, especially during the times of the Kranj Group, developed a particular version of the *nouveau roman*, especially with his novel *Triptih Agate Schwarzkobler* (*Triptych of Agata Schwarzkobler*), published in 1968 (although parts of the texts appeared earlier in

2. See T. Brjc, 'Juvenilia', in *Tank! Slovenska zgodovinska avantgarda*, Moderna galerija, Ljubljana 1998, p.137

different magazines). Both the essential idea of the representatives of the *nouveau roman* that being has no meaning outside itself (most clearly expressed in Robbe-Grillet's statement 'être-là — pour rien') and their cold and precise descriptive style were obviously important for OHO's reism.

Arguably the first writer who introduced structuralist ideas in Slovenia was Taras Kermauner (actually the inventor of the term 'reism'), who was well informed about the new currents in philosophy and theory. In his interpretations of Slovene contemporary literature, he developed a particular form of structuralism. Dušan Pirjevec was also interested in structuralist approaches in the literary sciences, and lectured and wrote about them extensively. But even more important were the close contacts with the young generation of theoreticians who studied structuralist and post-structuralist theories even more thoroughly. The connections between OHO and these writers became perhaps most obvious in the attempts to start a new magazine, *Katalog* (*Catalogue*), that would present both avant-garde literature and art and structuralist-based theory and criticism.³ The idea of the new magazine should also remind us of the fact that OHO was supported by art critics, theorists and philosophers, especially those whose thinking was connected to structuralist and post-structuralist theories and who considered the work of OHO to be somehow parallel to their own efforts. For a short period, OHO even worked in the broader context of the *Katalog* group.⁴ Among the writers that were close to OHO were, for example, Tomaž Brejc and Braco Rotar (who both supported OHO as critics and theoreticians), Rastko Močnik, Slavoj Žižek and others. As it is obvious from Plamen's already mentioned 'The Manifesto of Seriality', the concept of the series as a key concept in reism could easily be connected to structuralist ideas.

What seems striking and almost contradictory in reistic production is the combination of seemingly opposing principles. A strictly systematic, even mathematics-based approach was combined with the idea of free play and the use of paradox and coincidence. These differences were partly connected to different individuals (Pogačnik had always been systematic in his work; Matanović, on the other hand, often preferred the unpredictability of situations and playfulness), but also, more importantly, on the different sources referred to by OHO artists. While the structuralist- and semiotics-based approaches seem strongly present in OHO's work, we should not forget another important line that goes back to the classical avant-gardes, and especially Dada. OHO, especially in its first period, has sometimes been compared to Fluxus, and OHO actions, performances and happenings have been described as Fluxus actions. It is indeed tempting to compare both movements that ran, for some time at least, parallel to each other. But rather than assuming that there existed an actual strong link between Fluxus and OHO (information about Fluxus was minimal, especially in the mid-1960s) we could say that the similarities between the two movements are based, at least to a certain extent, on the same source that they referred to, historical Dada.

3. The first issue of *Katalog* was published in 1968 as a special issue of the *Problemi* magazine. *Katalog 2* was published as a separate book in 1969.

4. The OHO-Katalog group participated at the Belgrade theatre festival BITEF in 1968.

The Great-Grandfathers

At the end of 1968 and the beginning of 1969 an essential change took place in the OHO movement. At this time, Pogačnik and Geister as the leading personalities of OHO reism were in the army. The activities of the OHO movement continued in the autumn and winter of 1968, but OHO seemed to be in a crisis. Although the OHO artists made some interesting actions, it nevertheless seemed that a certain pattern was exhausted and that the actions were becoming somehow repetitive. At that time Tomaž Šalamun, who had previously been connected to OHO, but primarily as a poet, started to work

with OHO as a visual artist. Šalamun, who was at that time a curator at the Moderna galerija (i.e. Museum of Modern Art) in Ljubljana, knew the contemporary currents in the arts well. He had recently been on study trips to Paris and Italy, where he had also met some of the Arte Povera artists. He combined this knowledge with his own ideas about a possible visual language that were obviously also connected to his poetic practice (on the other hand, his poetry has always been packed with references to visual art and art history). In late 1968, he joined the OHO visual artists (Matanović, Nez and his brother Andraž) and established with them a group which then separated from the former OHO movement. For a short time, they even stopped using the name OHO and replaced it with the name Great-Grandfathers (the name of their first exhibition). This decision indicates that they abandoned several of OHO's ideas and approaches, especially the severe reistic demands, and replaced them with experiments into contemporary art trends. This change was very clearly demonstrated at the exhibition in the Museum of Contemporary Art in Zagreb in February 1969, entitled *The Great-Grandfathers*. This show was the first adequate demonstration of Arte Povera principles in the art world of the former Yugoslavia. The artists, for example, used 'poor' (often organic), materials like hay, husks, hemp, steel wool, etc. As they were presented, they had no firm formal structure; they often appeared as haphazard, amorphous and often very temporary conglomerations (i.e. they represented anti form rather than form). The other important aspect of the show was the fact that the objects interacted with the gallery space. Several of them, such as *The Wood* by Andraž Šalamun (an environment made of inflated elements), *The Elephant* by Matanović or the steel wool *Jungle* by Nez could be described as environments rather than mere objects.

Arte Povera, and particularly Pino Pascalli, was the most obvious influence on the *Great-Grandfathers* exhibition. Matanović's environment *Elephant*, for example, was directly reminiscent of Pascalli's animal sculptures (*Ricostruzione del dinosauro* 1966, *Trofei di caccia* 1966, and *Coda di delfino* 1967). Even with some of the other works one could search for such (albeit not so obvious) connections. The *Jungle* by Nez could remind us of Pascalli's *Closed Trap* 1968, *Lianas* 1968 and *Bridge* 1968, and his *Roof* of Pascalli's flat works (e.g. *Campi arrati e canali di irrigazione* 1967, *32m² di mare circa* 1967 and *Stuoia* 1968). Šalamun's piles of hay and cornhusks could refer to Pascalli's *Balla di fieno* 1967. Another possible reference is the work of Mario Merz, particularly his use of natural materials such as hay and wood.

A typical work from the *Great-Grandfathers* exhibition was the stack of hay, installed in a gallery space by Tomaž Šalamun. It very clearly indicates his artistic approach, as well as the way in which he (and other members of the group) understood Arte Povera. Šalamun has mentioned several times that his experience when he suddenly saw an everyday object (a bookcase, a stack of hay) as a sculpture was the basis for his decision to start to work as a visual artist. In contrast to the strictness of reistic attentive looking (as represented by Pogačnik and IG Plamen), the main principle of Šalamun's work was a certain poetic arbitrariness. He did not accept the methodical approach of reism nor did he use rational plans for his works. Rather, he stressed the poetical effect of the chosen materials and their unusual connections, play and invention. He was choosing and isolating singular things or events and transposing them into the context of art. This transposition could take place in reality — as in the installation of the stack of hay in the gallery — or through photography that represents the artist's eye and his act of selection (as is the case with the so-called 'photo-projects'). The change of medium, however, did not affect the status of the chosen object or situation. A photographed situation was, for Šalamun, no less a sculpture than was an object or a situation in a gallery.

We should therefore say that the artists in the *Great-Grandfathers* show remained selective in their relation towards the Arte Povera movement. They displayed no real interest in a number of essential issues addressed by the Italians. It seems that Pistoletto or Boetti had little, if any importance for them, and even the interest in Merz obviously did not include his complex ideas on which his use of neon or the form of the igloo were based.

Furthermore, it was no coincidence that, at this stage, the group moved from urban and natural environments into the gallery space. This move was temporary — very soon, OHO artists returned to urban public space and to nature — but it was necessary for the re-definition of OHO's work. Šalamun's hay, for example, gained its specific effect from the very fact that it was placed in a gallery space. In the context of reism, the art gallery was no different to any other space where one could turn the attention of people to things, and it had no privileged position by comparison with, for example, a bookstore, a street or a gramophone-record shop. But the *Great-Grandfathers* were only possible in a gallery of contemporary art. In short, if the aim of Plamen and Pogačnik, during the first period of OHO, had been to see a stack of hay, it was the aim of Tomaž Šalamun, in the *Great-Grandfathers'* show, to see it as a *sculpture*. This shift became the starting point for a new development of the group's work.

Materials, Processes, and Families

Soon after the *Great-Grandfathers* exhibition, the group was re-joined by Marko Pogačnik and, for some time, by Srečo Dragan (who had taken part in OHO actions and performances in the public spaces of Ljubljana in 1968). The artists started to use the name OHO again and in such a way admitted continuity with their previous activities. Iztok Geister, however, remained distant from the new OHO and continued to work primarily as a poet, developing his particular poetic approach and reistic strategies.⁵ The group organised further exhibitions, in Ljubljana and in Kranj,⁶ where they continued and even strengthened the new aesthetics of an arbitrary and poetic act of selection and combination and the romanticisation of materials. This is particularly true for the four artists of the *Great-Grandfathers* exhibition. It seems that in the short time that passed after the Zagreb project, they expanded the possibilities for the use of different materials and of the formal and semantic structures of their work. On the first of three exhibition projects, Nez, Matanović and Andraž Šalamun worked primarily with materials. Nez displayed a heap of soil with two planks, leaning against the two opposite walls of the room, a pile of scrap iron and the installation called *Cosmology* (see more about this work in the chapter dedicated to the role of the body). Matanović exhibited an old airplane tyre, an armchair placed in 'clouds' made of hemp, a pile of old springs that also formed a sort of cloud, etc. Andraž Šalamun presented a heap of sawdust, wheelbarrows and some real rabbits. Tomaž Šalamun perhaps reached the peak of his playful, poetic and anarchic approach in the visual arts with his exhibition Kranj.⁷ He covered the whole ground-floor exhibition space with wood chips, while in the basement space he installed two works, the previously mentioned *Kitten* and *Morje (The Sea)*: six boys, wearing some kind of theatre military uniform, lay on the floor, and on them was written in dough the word 'MORJE'.

Compared with the Zagreb project, the works from these two exhibitions showed both continuity and development. While the works from the *Great-Grandfathers* clearly indicated models from the Arte Povera movement, and especially from Pascalli, the works from the Ljubljana and Kranj exhibitions demonstrated a

5. His last reistic collection of poems, *Parjenje čevljev (Coupling of Shoes)* was published in 1977, after that he abandoned poetry for a long period.

6. At the Moderna galerija in Ljubljana, there were two exhibitions, the first with Matanović, Nez and Andraž Šalamun, the second with Pogačnik and Dragan. Tomaž Šalamun, who, at the time was still working at the Moderna galerija, took part in this series with an exhibition he prepared at the France Prešeren Exhibition Hall in Kranj.

7. The exhibition was considered to be so provocative and decadent that the local authorities closed it immediately after the opening. In their opinion, such art was not appropriate for the proletarian city of Kranj.

much more independent approach. We could perhaps say that the OHO artists needed the Arte Povera models to formulate the elements of a new language. But once such elements were formed, the artists could develop their work much more freely. The Ljubljana and Kranj exhibitions and further OHO projects prove two things; that the OHO artists were relatively well informed about contemporary developments in the arts⁸ and that, within this context, they developed a particular line of work that not only responded to the new tendencies in art, but also followed earlier OHO ideas and approaches. For example, the clarity, effectiveness and simplicity of Nez's installation with soil and two planks, indicates a solution to a particular spatial situation rather than an adaptation of an existing example.

Srečo Dragan and Marko Pogačnik, who exhibited together in the second exhibition in the Moderna galerija, returned the systematic approach to OHO. Dragan displayed ludistic and ironic objects using materials offered to him by consumer society. His use of film was very important. Rather than projecting films, he installed works with the equipment and materials that are the necessary material basis for a projected film, but remain invisible and forgotten during the projection: film projector, metal boxes for films, etc. This approach could be connected to the strategies of reism (e.g. to the shift from the text to the book), but it also represents an example of the idea of 'expanded cinema', a reflection on the illusion and reality in film. Pogačnik displayed a programmed environment for which he used cards with drawings arranged according to a strict numeric key. The return of the rational, systematic aspect proved to be very important, as it became a basis for further development of conceptual tendencies in OHO's art, and eventually the group's particular form of concept art.

It is perhaps interesting to notice that the three exhibitions in Ljubljana and Kranj took place at exactly the same time (March and April 1969) as the famous project by Harald Szeemann, *When Attitudes Become Form*. The attitudes and forms at the OHO exhibitions were, to a large extent, very similar to the works made by the artists in Szeemann's show in Bern. In his introductory text, Szeemann spoke about a complex phenomenon in contemporary art that did not have a common name and that connected particular aspects and approaches, such as 'anti-form, micro-emotive art, possible art, impossible art, concept art, Arte Povera and earth art.'⁹ Szeemann also pointed at another important aspect that was also present in the OHO exhibitions. He spoke about the importance of the artist's activity. Artists are not interested in mere spatial forms any more; their main subject and contents are artist's activity. Therefore, objects are not unavoidable and can be replaced by information. On the other hand, it is important that the creative process remains visible in the final product.

Different aspects and principles of the new, nameless artistic movement mentioned by Szeemann in his text were also the context of OHO's works of that time. Clearly, Arte Povera remained an essential reference for OHO, even if the connections became much less direct.¹⁰ Another parallel to OHO work from 1969 and, partly, 1970, are the works of American post-minimalist and 'anti-form' artists. Arte Povera and anti-form could in fact be understood as parallel, tightly connected movements. The characteristics of anti-form sculpture (lack of interest in constructed forms and attention to the material, its physical qualities, tensions in it and its processes) are also strongly present in OHO art. The three essential aspects of anti-form sculpture that are equally important for OHO are the aesthetic and poetic power of materials (represented, for example, by Alan Sarret), the process (this was strongly present especially in the work of Richard Serra), and Barry Le Va's principles of the

8. Important sources of information for OHO — as well as travel and increasingly numerous personal contacts — were art magazines, especially *Studio International* and *Artforum*.

9. H. Szeemann, 'Zur Ausstellung', in N. Bätzner (ed.), *Arte Povera. Manifeste, Statements, Kritiken*, Verlag der Kunst, Dresden and Basel 1995, p. 100. Szeemann's text was first published in *When Attitudes Become Form*, Kunsthalle Bern, Bern 1969.

10. We should mention that not only the works of Arte Povera artists were important for OHO, but increasingly also Germano Celant's programmatic texts.

distribution of materials (that could be compared to the idea of the programme in OHO's work). Although we could probably assume that OHO artists did not have comprehensive information about anti-form artists, we could point to several works that are very close to American works from approximately the same time.¹¹ (We could mention the 'clouds' of old springs by Matanović, or his works with hemp.)

Compared to the *Great-Grandfathers* exhibition, the exhibitions in Ljubljana and Kranj in the spring of 1969 made a shift from mere fascination with materials to relations and processes. This aspect became fully developed with the so-called *Summer Projects* of 1969. With these projects, the OHO artists left the gallery space again (although they kept returning to it in their exhibition projects) and started to work in the open air, first in the city and then in the landscape. The *Summer Projects* introduced or fully developed a number of new important aspects in OHO's work. One of them was the idea of land art (we will discuss this aspect a little later). Another was the new importance of documentation (many of these projects were not only very short-lived, but also attended by very small groups of people, mostly by the group members and a few of their close friends, so documentary photographs, drawings and explanatory texts became the only way to present such works to the public). On the other hand, the issues of process and relation were very strongly present in the *Summer Projects*. Matanović, for example, arranged long sticks between branches or between trees and used balance and tension to keep them in place. David Nez made an ephemeral environment using very simple means — by throwing rolls of toilet paper over bushes and trees. This is clearly a process work, which could, from his point of view be compared to Serra's splashing of lead — using, of course, a totally different context, referential background, and relationship to the surroundings.

Material and conceptual relations were perhaps most precisely dealt with in a group of works that Marko Pogačnik entitled *Family of Fire, Water and Air*. In a sense, the group represents a synthesis of Pogačnik's rational, systematic approach and of the new role of materials in OHO art. Pogačnik used different combinations of the three materials (fire, water and air). Their relations could be either static or dynamic (depending on whether such relations caused a process or a transformation). To understand this type of work better we should mention some examples. In *Water — Air Static*, for example, Pogačnik filled several plastic bags half with water and half with air and put them into a river. The part of the bag filled with water remained in water, the part filled with air remained outside it. In *Water — Air Dynamic*, however, he filled the bags just with air. He fixed weights onto them to keep them in the water, and thus created a tension between water and air that pressed to get out of the water. In *Fire — Water Dynamic*, he set a plastic bag filled with water on fire. The result of the process was air (carbon dioxide and steam) and ashes. The works were presented with documentary photographs and conceptual drawings explaining the relations between elements and their developments. The basic principle of these works is, therefore, no longer the series or the numeric programme. The elements are connected in dynamic, functional and mutually defining relations that Pogačnik described as 'family'. The real subject of these works is not their immediate materiality, but the relations and transformations of the materials used. Even the materiality itself is, to a certain extent, abstract; since Pogačnik made use of the traditional theory of the four elements and therefore these works represent not so much the direct sensual effects of the chosen materials but different aspects of the three materials (elements) as such. This abstract and conceptual aspect of Pogačnik's work became even more obvious in his next family, called *Family of Weight, Measure and Position*. Pogačnik installed works from this

11. Although the beginnings of the 'anti-form' could be placed in 1965 and 1966, we should keep in mind that this type of art became more broadly known and recognised only in 1968, especially after Robert Morris organised the exhibition *Anti-Form 1968*, and published a text with the same title.

series at exhibitions in Novi Sad and Belgrade in November and December 1969. It was obvious from the very title of the series that Pogačnik was dealing with relations and not with materials. He was demonstrating the interdependent connections of three types of relations. The best example of this approach was a work where Pogačnik hung a series of different weights to lines that ran over razor blades. The position of each blade was different, depending on the size of the weight. The artist was interested in general, and therefore abstract relations; it is possible in principle to re-install different projects from the series at any time or even replace them with a sketch since there are those basic relations which form the content of the works, and they can only be grasped conceptually. With these works, OHO actually arrived at conceptual art. It is typical of OHO's conceptual works that they very often deal with relations. The actual conceptual content of their conceptual works is usually relational patterns, very often represented with geometrical forms. Although the OHO artists progressively used a conceptual approach, they never completely abandoned their interest in different materials, processes and relations.

The 1969 *Summer Projects* and OHO's Land Art

We mentioned before that with the so-called *Summer Projects* in 1969 the OHO artists introduced a particular type of land art. Matanović's projects, for example, were very typical of OHO land art. In his installations with wooden sticks in the wood, he usually did not use nails or other aggressive means, but simply stuck the sticks between braches or behind trunks. His project *Wheat and Rope* is rightfully considered to be one of the best examples of OHO land art. The work consisted only of a taut rope, drawn across a wheat-field, gently bending the wheat. This minimal action resulted in the inclusion in the work of the entire surroundings, the emotional content of the scene, but also the numerous references connected with the subject of a wheat-field.

In spring and summer 1969, David Nez made several projects in the landscape using mirrors. Probably the first (from early spring) was a square mirror placed vertically in a meadow. Nez was, of course, interested in reflection, in the idea of a material object that visually almost disappears and, at the same time, causes a disturbance in our perception. This idea was best formulated in a project where he used three vertical mirrors installed in a field.¹² The real form of this work is, in fact, the documentary photograph. In it, the mirrors create a puzzling rhythm of actual views and reflections. Furthermore, the mirrors seem to be placed frontally, all in a line, but in fact they were not. This is why the edges of the field and of the wood in the mirrors do not run in the same line, but form three steps.

We usually connect the idea of land art with the earthworks of American artists like Heizer, De Maria, Smithson, Morris and others. The approach developed by OHO, however, was completely different from such works, even opposite to them. The genuine locations of American earthworks (produced at about the time as OHO land art projects and later) were huge deserts or industrially devastated areas, and the artists used all possibilities of industrial technology for their gigantic works. The tradition they followed was that of American sublime art (this is evident not only from their choice of the desert and its extreme conditions, but also from their admiration for technology and its destructive powers), as well as the American ideology of endless open space that is at man's disposal. The space where OHO artists worked, on the other hand, was a cultivated, relatively limited landscape, e.g. fields, woods or meadows. Such spaces demanded small-scale works and the use of simple, even pre-industrial hand tools and technology. It was very important that such works

12. Nez also made some models for large-scale works with mirrors in the landscape, which were never realised.

did not affect the landscape irreparably (in fact, after the action there were no consequences for the location at all). The artist's contact with the natural surroundings was personal, very direct and also sensual, corporeal. Artists tried to be as non-aggressive as possible when entering their location and to adapt their works harmoniously to the site. This particular aspect is connected both to an ecological attitude and to the idea of a balance and circulation of natural energies and processes. These ideas became especially clear and central in the last period of OHO's work. Furthermore, the attentive and non-aggressive attitude could perhaps be connected to the tradition of early OHO, for example to the reistic idea of looking at things.

The real context for OHO's land art are therefore not earthworks but projects that were less aggressive towards their site, less monumental, more ephemeral and perhaps more conceptual and meditative. The works of Richard Long certainly belong to such projects. Walking as an intimate and physical connection to a landscape and its natural and cultural characteristics, the non-aggressive marking of sites, connections between actual physical experience and ideal, conceptual forms — all these aspects of Long's art could be interesting for OHO artists. Another interesting aspect of Long's work is his attention to the cultural and historical layers of the landscapes through which he walks. OHO artists, too, were strongly aware that they did not work in an empty space. In 1970, for example, they made a map on which they marked the locations of their projects in relation to historical and pre-historical sites.

It would also be interesting to compare OHO land art projects (and their rituals in the landscape from 1970) to the works of Dennis Oppenheim. Some of Oppenheim's works show an approach similar to that of OHO, and his works with locations, his ephemeral interventions and his play with reality and cartographic representation are certainly a more appropriate context to OHO's activities than are earthworks.¹³ Nevertheless, we can also see interesting differences between Oppenheim and the OHO group, based on the different social and cultural contexts in which they worked. OHO artists, for example, would never 'brand' a landscape, as Oppenheim did in his *Branded Mountain* 1969. The differences are very obvious if we compare Oppenheim's works with wheat and *Wheat and Rope* by Matanović. In Oppenheim's *Directed Seeding* and *Cancelled Crop* both 1969, one finds little, if any of the romanticism that it is so strongly present in Matanović's minimal action. Oppenheim refers to large-scale, industrial production, and the wheat is treated just as a material. It is especially interesting to compare Matanović's *Wheat and Rope* with Oppenheim's *Surface Indentation*. Both works are interventions into wheat fields, but Oppenheim works with a large, machine-tended field where the plants form a thick and regular pattern and thus a seemingly firm and regular surface. By cutting into this surface, Oppenheim stressed the industrial character of the field. The field with which Matanović worked, on the other hand, was much smaller, it obviously belonged not to a large production system of a single culture, but to a pre-industrial small farmer. Matanović's approach was thus more personal and gentle, and much more loaded with emotional values and traditional meanings.

Robert Smithson was arguably more interesting for OHO than were other earthworks artists. First of all, constructions in the landscape represented only one aspect of his complex work, and the members of OHO involved in a variety of different media and practices, could find this aspect attractive. Furthermore, his large earthworks (such as *Spiral Jetty* and *Broken Circle*) are very complex in their meanings and references. OHO artists were not too interested in the issues of the post-industrial, devastated areas (an aspect that was extremely important for Smithson),

13. His early piece, *Viewing Station* 1967, could almost be described as a Reistic work. The piece consists of a pedestal on which the viewer can stand. Thus, the viewer is transformed into an object of observing; on the other hand, of course, the person standing on the pedestal also has a better view of the room.

but they could appreciate Smithson's search for balance in landscape (e.g. positive and negative forms, vertical and horizontal structures, references to local traditions and to the yin-yang balance in the *Broken Circle*) quite attractive. It would be interesting to compare Nez's landscape installations with mirrors and Smithson's series of *Mirror Displacements* 1969. It is true that Smithson might be one of the sources for Nez's decision to work with mirrors, although there were also other artists working in this way. However, *Mirror Displacements* were done at the same time as Nez's installations with mirrors and was only published in autumn 1969, so we can say that Nez developed his work independently. It is interesting to observe the similarities and the differences of the main idea of creating different mirror installations in the landscape. Nez was not interested, as Smithson was, in marking different sites with mirrors. Rather, he used mirrors to create complex perceptual games with real views and reflections, with actual landscape and image.

From the Liberated to the Cosmic Body

OHO's activities are also connected to the beginnings of body art in Slovenia. Throughout the history of OHO, the body was an essential aspect of their work and thought. The OHO project implied the idea of the liberation of the body and then (through a re-disciplining of the body in meditation practices, rituals and esoteric schooling) lead to its re-harmonisation with the universe and eventually completed itself with an attempt at a total community where art and life would not be separated and which would live in harmony with itself, nature and the cosmic order. However, body art did not represent a clear and connected line in OHO's work. Rather than speaking of body art in the sense that might be connected to the leading representatives of body art at that time (Acconci, Nauman, Oppenheim, etc.), we might refer to the idea of the body in various practices and approaches in their work. The role of the body in OHO's activities was quite varied and could not always be described as body art in the strictest sense (although some of them could). OHO's performances, happenings or intermedial actions also included an important role for the body. The specificities in the use and understanding of the body in OHO's art are thus based on the fact that the issues of the body were always considered to be parts of a broader context with which OHO was dealing.

The beginning of OHO body art can be found in an action by Marko Pogačnik, realised in an exhibition of regional artists in Kranj in 1966. This was, in fact, a protest action; pressure from local politicians led to the removal of Pogačnik's work from the show. Therefore the artist decided to exhibit himself, i.e. his own body. During opening hours, he stood in the exhibition room, in the classical contraposto stance, from his neck a board hung on which he had written that he was exhibiting his own body since he was unable to exhibit his artworks. An important aspect here is that Pogačnik did not understand this action only as a protest, but also explicitly as a possibility to use his own body as a means of artistic expression.

In spite of the inclusion of the body art issues in the work of OHO, projects that followed and that included a strong role for the body could not be described as body art proper, but as happenings and performances. An action by Andraž Šalamun in his environment *Gozd (The Wood)*, however, could be understood as body art. Šalamun used his environment made of soft forms, filled with air, as an erotic field for his body.¹⁴ The eroticised body was, even more emphatically, present in his *Kama Sutra* project, published as a photo work in 1970.

The project often mentioned as being central to OHO body art is David Nez's *Cosmology* 1969. Originally, the work was not intended to be an environment for an

14. In connection to Šalamun's pneumatic environment, it is interesting to mention the article by Willoughby Sharp, 'Air Art' (published in *Studio International*, Vol. 175, n° 900, 1968, pp. 262-5). Sharp wrote about the use of air in art as a part of the tendencies to get rid of the object in art and replace it with events. It is perhaps also interesting to compare Šalamun's environment with the *Pneumatic Environment* 1968 by Graham Stevens. A reproduction of the work was published as an illustration in Sharp's article.

artist's body. The work was a reference to the space travel that was such an important issue in the late 1960s, but also — less explicitly — referred to the tradition of cosmic visions and theories. With the decision to use his own body as a part of the work, Nez meaningfully completed his piece and greatly expanded its connotations. The posture of the lying body inside the circle, for example, reminds of the well-known Leonardo drawing. *Cosmology*, however, does not indicate the idea of an anthropocentric universe but rather an ecstatic experience of the body that can (through breathing and meditation) harmonise and unite with the cosmos.

These connotations indicated an understanding of the body in the last period of OHO. The central idea of that period was a search for balance and harmony on the micro- as well as macro-levels and the concept of the body was also a part of this understanding. The aim of OHO artists was to include the body in the harmonious idea of a person, and to find balanced relations for the individual with the group, nature, culture, and the universe as a whole. Projects with the body were, therefore, replaced with exercises and rituals that helped to find such harmonious relations. Such exercises dealt with food, body movements, breathing, etc. David Nez, especially, remained strongly interested in the concept of breathing and in the idea of the co-ordination of bodily processes (even after the group ceased to exist).

Space, Time, Group, and the Cosmos: OHO's Conceptual Art

In 1970 it seemed that OHO was quickly and surely achieving international recognition. The first important indication was Kynaston McShine's invitation to take part in the *Information* show at MOMA in June. In April they exhibited at the Techne Gallery in Florence, run by Pier-Luigi Tazzi. In July, they were eminently presented at the 4th Belgrade Triennial of Contemporary Art in the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade, at that time the central contemporary art event in Yugoslavia. In August, they were visited by Walter De Maria, who also took part in some of their 'schooling' projects. In September they worked and exhibited at the legendary Aktionsraum 1 in Munich. However, their November exhibition at the Municipal Gallery in Ljubljana proved to be their final project. At the threshold of international success, OHO decided to abandon the world of art.¹⁵ This seemingly unexpected decision is connected to their ideas about the role of art as a reservoir of creativity and their reluctance to enter the art system, and especially the art market, but also to the transformation of their work and of the nature of their group.

These two aspects, the nature of the work and the nature of the group, were becoming progressively intertwined, until the group (or better, the 'community') itself became the actual subject and aim of the work. Tomaž Brejc used the term 'transcendental conceptualism' to describe the particular nature of OHO's conceptual art and to accentuate its difference from the rational and analytical conceptual art, developed by Art & Language, Joseph Kosuth and others. OHO artists, on the other hand, (more and more) often introduced spiritual, esoteric, or even mystical dimensions into their works. Here, the concept of the 'community' of artists was essential. The community was the central point for such spiritual tendencies, the point of connection of the micro- and macro-cosmos. The transcendental nature of such conceptual art is based on the aim to reach such harmonious relations. The harmony can only be achieved by, and within, the group and the projects are actually the means to achieve such harmony. This also means that art has crossed the border that separated it from life.

In fact there is no dividing line between the group and the community, and neither between the conceptual project in the more usual sense and 'transcendental

15. The fact that they were represented in Lucy Lippard's well-known book *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*, published in 1973, i.e. two years after OHO abandoned art, is an indicator of the attention they already received.

conceptualism'. The process took place in the first half of 1970. At this time, the group was reduced to four members, Matanović, Nez, Pogačnik and Andraž Šalamun. Relations within the group were becoming more intense and important, and OHO was becoming more interested in the nature of the collective itself and the relations between its members, as well as relations between the group and its surroundings (location, nature, society, universe).

Not all OHO's conceptual projects can be described as 'transcendental conceptualism'. Prior to 1970 OHO members produced several works that preempt it; on the other hand, during 1970 they were also doing projects that cannot be described as strongly transcendental. Obvious precursors of the works dealing with the nature of the collective were *families*, developed by Pogačnik. A family is a whole made of different individual elements. The relations between such elements are dynamic, interactive, sometimes even opposing. It is, however, this dynamic that produces a unity of a higher order. After all, it is certainly not a coincidence that the community, established by OHO artists after they abandoned the world of art in favour of an inseparable unity of art and life, was called the Šempas Family after the village Šempas where it was located.

The *Family of Water, Air and Fire* is interesting in this context as it refers to the four traditional elements and thus to the cosmological and cosmogonical theories. On the other hand, the *Family of Weight, Measure and Position* indicates the approach that cannot be described as transcendental conceptualism. We could perhaps speak about two strands in OHO's conceptual works (that are, however, never totally separated). One of them is transcendental conceptualism, the other is more rational and analytical. There are three types of such analytical works. The first group deals with time and space relations, the second addresses issues of mediality, the third deals with self-definition and the self-analysis of its own conditions and determinants.

It seems that OHO artists were quite interested in clear, regular geometric forms that visually represented temporal relations. Nez, for example, used a camera to record the moving of a point of light (a flare) in different ways and directions. The pictures show different forms (a straight line, a circle, a curve etc) that are actually visual (spatial) equivalents to movement (time). It seems that in these and similar works, OHO artists were interested in symmetry and symmetrical relations (even the clearly transcendental projects often included symmetric structures). Several OHO works from 1970 dealt directly with symmetry.

The idea of mediality, of in-between forms and states, was already important in the first period of OHO. The very word OHO is, for example, the medial form of words 'oko' (eye) and 'uho' (ear). In the context of OHO's conceptual art, the idea of mediality became important again. The most precise work dealing with it is Pogačnik's project *Medial Systems*. Pogačnik used three realistic shapes of animals and placed them in three regular geometric shapes, circle, square and triangle. He used a mathematical system to transform the animal shapes into types of anamorphoses that represent the medial form between the realistic shapes and the geometric forms. Another work dealing with the idea of mediality is Matanović's *Medial Form*, where the artist presents himself as a medial form between two people with very different personalities, his father (whose family name he has) and his uncle (whose personal name he has).

It seems that the interest in transcendental works slightly overshadowed some of the more self-reflective works dealing with the self-definition, self-description and self-analysis of the work. Yet such works existed. Nez did several such projects and a very typical work of this type was carried out in Munich. Nez wrote a text on the

wall. He then photographed the text and projected the negative of the image onto it, and so completed the work by erasing it. The text was a description of the project and the plan of the artist's work, and it disappeared with its own realisation.

The continuity between the late, transcendental works and the earlier OHO project is perhaps most obvious with the works in the landscape. (In fact, we could follow this line back to 1962, to Pogačnik's first attempt at a landscape work in Zarica. It is perhaps more than a coincidence that OHO in the last landscape works returned to Zarica.) OHO land art projects always tried to exist harmoniously in the landscape, and not to mark it too aggressively, try to possess it or even damage and change it. These projects were ephemeral, realised with small, intimate groups of participants, and later presented with documentation. All these experiences and attitudes became important again in the last period of OHO, especially in the process of 'schooling'.

Several other projects also foretold the later transcendental work. Nez's *Cosmology* is perhaps the clearest example. The body of the artist lying on the floor and breathing in a special way indicated synchronization with the cosmos achieved through meditative practices, such as breathing. The term 'transcendental conceptualism' is probably based on OHO's use of esoteric practices, such as meditation and telepathy, in their conceptual works. In 1970 OHO artists realised some telepathy-based projects. In February, Nez and Matanović went to New York, while Pogačnik and Šalamun remained in Ljubljana. At this time, they realised two projects, both called *Intercontinental Group Project America — Europe*. In the first one, proposed by Pogačnik, the four participants drew a sign into a field at the same time. In the second one, proposed by Matanović, the four participants simultaneously looked into the sun, dropped a match onto a piece of paper and marked its position. It would be wrong, however, to assume that the intention of these projects was to develop telepathic abilities (the results, in fact, do not show them). Rather we should understand them as systematic rituals used to connect the group more tightly together, a sort of training in formulating group identity. The actual results are not important, what is important is that practice of such rituals were undertaken to build OHO's collective identity.

Besides the projects realised simultaneously at different locations, OHO artists also performed actions in the landscape that they called rituals. Such ritual, however, was only one part of the project. Other parts were usually the concept and the documentary photographs and (or) film. The artists became attentive to the location of different elements of their works. A ritual could, for example, be performed in Zarica; the text about it was published in the catalogue of the *Belgrade Triennial*, while the film was presented in New York at the *Information* show. In such a way, the project was dispersed in space and time, but as a concept, of course, it remained unique.

The historical aspect was an important element in the late work of OHO. The search for harmony therefore included not only the synchronous, but also the diachronous, historical dimension. This interest in history might be surprising if we know how reluctant OHO artists were about the idea that their work could be described in art historical terms and placed within historical development. OHO artists often declared that they were only interested in the present moment. They did not even care very much for their own work. And yet, in the last period of their work the axis of time and history became very important. Again, we could mention the map that shows OHO projects in relation to historical sites — a mediaeval church, archeological sites, etc.

Schooling

In the first half of 1970, the artists worked very intensely, preparing materials for the *Information* exhibition. The second important group of (mostly conceptual) works was undertaken for the *Belgrade Triennial*. On the other hand, as the main focus of their activities was the search for balanced relations inside the group and between the group and its surroundings, the art project seemed less and less to be an appropriate form for that. Instead, they developed a new form of work that they called 'schooling'. In summer 1970 they organised such schooling in Zarica, in the area of Sorško polje and in the village of Čezsoča in western Slovenia. During schooling they were not working on separate, individual projects. They were working constantly, throughout the day, and included in their practice all aspects of their life. They were constantly reflecting and conceptualising everything, from their food to breathing and walking. Schooling was, in a sense, a permanent search for patterns of relations. In a way similar to their late conceptual projects, they searched for geometric *gestalts* that represented such relations, their complexity as well as their harmonious nature represented by the precise geometrical forms. This approach could be applied to the whole universe and all connections within it. If they carried out small actions that could be considered as a project, they always included them in the general context and in the permanent process of conceptualisation.

Of course, such an approach demands constant attention, a strong discipline and an on-going thought process. One could say that the schooling completes the circle begun by reism that also demanded unvarying attention and self-awareness and included a number of practices that awakened and directed such attention. Schooling also included techniques and practices that awakened and developed attention, which systematically conceptualised all the details of one's activities, and constantly built balanced relations in all spheres, from the individual to the out-of-the-world sphere.

All this does not mean that after they began their schooling, OHO artists completely abandoned art projects. Quite the opposite, they remained active in the art world. Two projects from the second half of 1970 are worth mentioning. In September, they exhibited in Aktionsraum 1 in Munich. In fact, this was not an exhibition in the usual sense. During the exhibition, the artists worked and developed projects; every evening they presented the new results of their daily work. In November, they organised an exhibition in the Municipal Gallery in Ljubljana where they presented both analytical and transcendental conceptual works. As it happened, this was their last exhibition project. It was during this exhibition that the OHO members started serious discussions about the possibility of abandoning not only the world of art, but also the usual daily life and to try to develop a new model of life based on ideas developed during the schooling.

The Šempas Family

Schooling offered OHO a possible model where conceptual practice became life and life became conceptual practice. They aimed at a way of life that would re-unite everyday activities and creativity and, which would return art from its special reservation back to life. In such a life, art as a particular field would be unnecessary since art would be present in each detail of everyday life.

In April 1971, the four OHO artists settled with their families and some friends on an abandoned farm in the village of Šempas in western Slovenia. The Šempas Family was based on the ideas established during the late OHO. The main idea was to find a way of life that would be based on balanced relations within the family and in

relation to the group and its more or less immediate contexts. A direct connection also exists between the practices of the Šempas Family and OHO land art. The members of the OHO community did not work with land art projects, of course, but their farming, their use of traditional technologies and crafts and their search for perfect patterns in their relations with fields, meadows and woods was based on ideas similar to their earlier projects in the landscape. The members of the community were strongly involved in meditation, breathing exercises and similar esoteric practices. On the other hand, they did not abandon art. Drawing, for example, was a daily ritual for them. The drawing style was directly connected to the typical reistic drawing from the first half of the 1960s, and the subject of their drawings were plants and other things found in their everyday life. They also produced interesting objects with the use of traditional crafts (weaving, pottery, wood-cutting, forging). These objects represented, in a concentrated way, their life, and indicated that this life was a crossing point for many circulating nets and processes. They still used conceptual drawing to present connections. It is perhaps interesting that these drawings (done primarily by Pogačnik) were different to OHO conceptual works. Pogačnik started to use more organic forms, circles, spirals and curves that indicate complex processes, their circulations and connections.

The Šempas Family can be considered the conclusion of OHO. The history of OHO proper was completed when Matanović, Nez and Šalamun left Šempas about a year after the community was established. But the community remained active until 1979 and, in fact, represented a direct continuation of OHO. Pogačnik and his family remained on the farm, where he still lives, and gradually developed a particular work with the landscape that is largely based on the tradition of OHO.

Neo Rauch: Gravity's Smoke

Andreas Spiegl

Writing a piece about an artist for a publication entitled *East Art Map* — an artist who, with others, has been selected for being significant, representative or maybe as an exception in a particular region — naturally raises the question as to the thinking behind the adoption of this cultural and geographic perspective.

The very name — *East Art Map* — already hints at the difficulty of invoking the relevant cultural and geographic dialectic. The idea of an 'east art map', a compendium identifying characteristics that could be said to distinguish East from West, East and West from North and South, is rather uncanny: uncanny because of the memories that go with this dialectic — memories of a world order that established a cultural and political cartography which was itself in part intended to justify territorial boundaries by claiming that on this or that side of the border there were exclusively familiar or alien, friendly or hostile identities. According to that cultural and political dialectic borders made sense — be it as a defence against a different culture or as something to be crossed, pursuing one's own point of view and hence to the good of the other, which then becomes one's own, with reservations. This memory of earlier cultural and territorial boundaries is also uncanny in the German sense of the word — *unheimlich*, which literally means 'unhomely' — because that sense of the world operating according to those parameters as a 'homely', ordered place is no longer available to us. Where once *Heimat* was separated from all things alien, the borderline — the last outpost of trust — is now fraught with doubts concerning the very identity of that border. And the same doubts must accompany any attempt to establish an east art map, which seeks the coordinates of political identity in the place or region where an artist is born, thereby implicitly positing a fundamental difference to the West, the South and the North. Here the ground under an artist's feet — the *Grund und Boden* — becomes grounds for identifiable kinship. And if it turns out that this fundamental kinship between those born in the same territory should nevertheless be so riddled with differences that it can scarcely serve as the basis for some sense of cultural identity, there are a whole number of reasons for this. Either the territory in question has no significant cultural identity of its own, or the search for kinship of this kind is based on a false premise. So either the so-called East proves to be a cluster held together by its technical identity — and enough of a cluster to constitute a threat to established patterns of identity in the other points of the compass — or the kinship lies solely in exceptions to the rule and in differences. We have in common the fact that we have nothing in common. 'Difference relates', as Frederic Jameson once wrote in another place and another context.

If the common denominator in the territorial figure of the so-called East lies in the sheer difference of the figures — personalities — within it, this raises the question as to whether this difference is not a sufficient basis for the kinship that applies in other territories — in territories of place and time. Could it be that I have more in common with the Japanese film-maker Takeshi Kitano than with my all too familiar neighbours? Could it be that Neo Rauch is more closely related to Takeshi Kitano and William Kentridge than with his territorial contemporaries in the Leipzig art scene?

Wasn't modernism in fact an attempt to build cultural identity on parameters other than birthplace and the specific history of that place? Wasn't modernism in part characterised by the way that it took such an abstract view of the subject — as of place and time — that its attempt to gain ground ran aground in the story of this attempted emancipation from history? And is it possible that the modern abstraction of place and time merely concealed the level of abstraction of a concept of tradition? What if the crisis of modernism were so physically tangible and appeared so realistic that the territorial definition of historical concepts and the relevant motifs were now, in our own time, to appear more abstract and more virtual than the matter of non-representationalism? The 1950s sought to identify with hindsight a dialectic between East and West in the difference between abstraction and figuration. The abstract West and the realistic, figurative East. *Westkunst. Ostkunst.* Here modernism, there propaganda. Here the promised individual, there the promised society. As we said, with hindsight. With hindsight these promises ran into trouble. On both sides of the divide. Artists fled — rarely from the so-called West to the so-called East, more often from East to West. Gerhard Richter was one of these. But, looking over his shoulder, he not only distanced himself from the figuration or the realism of the East he had fled from, but used the same technique to focus on the formalism of the so-imagined abstraction of the so-called West. So, an artist goes from East to West, only to cast doubt on the viability of Western abstraction. But the possibility of being able to cite the so-imagined abstraction as required, also means defining that same abstraction as a form of representationalism. The question as to whether Richter should be categorised under representational or abstract painting couldn't be answered using those criteria.

Neo Rauch was born in Leipzig in 1960. He never fled from the East to the so-called West, either before the Wall came down or afterwards. Neo Rauch studied in Leipzig. At the Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst Leipzig. From 1981 to 1986 with Professor Arno Rink and 1986 to 1990 with Professor Bernhard Heisig. Leipzig School you might say: with professors whose pictorial language was at first sight about figurative narrative, although the details were highly expressive and at heart it was abstract. The ability to empathise with the contradictions and cruelties of reality was paramount. Rauch still lives in Leipzig, where he even taught from 1993 to 1998 at the Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst. Leipzig lies in the former so-called East, of Germany, and is currently doing its utmost — at least as a city — to become attractive to the so-called West. Like the present state of the dialectic of East and West, or abstraction and figuration, Leipzig — with all the complexity of its past — has to deal with a Leipzig that, like so many other cities, wants to modernise without losing selected traces of its history. Ripe for the abstraction of economy in the face of a glittering history and figuration of history. More figurative at the centre, or entirely abstract. At its margins, if anything, the traces of abstract modernism. To quote Lynn Cooke: 'Undoubtedly, Rauch's environs — and not least his studio site, located as it is in a largely empty late nineteenth-century warehouse in the desolate former

industrial zone of this once mighty metropolis — do bear substantially on the painter's imaginary. Equally plausible, however, is the counter-claim: that Rauch prefers such a site precisely because it jives with deeply grounded elements in his aesthetic.¹ All the indicators seem set to turn Neo Rauch and his work into a product of the Leipzig School and the City of Leipzig. A significant bastion of the so-called east art map.

There would of course be numerous cultural and geographic arguments for placing a certain emphasis on this localisation of Rauch and his work. Witness the range of his painterly skills that allows him to deploy any style with credibility. This in turn evokes the picture of an artistic training that people tend to associate with the East: a form of painting that develops not only individualistically and from a certain gut feeling, but which also bespeaks a sophisticated and profound knowledge of the full range of artistic options. The techniques of painting can be taught and learnt. Be it the motifs, the figures and poses that were reluctant to shed the *habitus* of socialist or propagandist painting in the postwar period. 'The figures' clothing and shoes refer to their background and activities.'² As in the days of a promised society and its producibility, in Rauch's paintings the picture of a society is worked at, hammered out. Tools and monuments cheek by jowl. Architectures as redolent of prefabricated apartment blocks and functionalism as of gabled terraces. Factories, chimneys and landscapes plus the relevant flora all help to underpin the impression of regional references. And if one also takes into account the debt of the language of his pictorial forms to the history of post-war design specific to that region, the overall impression is of a retrospective chronicle of the ex-GDR. Attention has already been drawn elsewhere to the fact that certain 'critical approaches have tended to single out as exceptional the artist's palette which, with its signature chalky, faded hues conjures evocatively post-war East European visual culture, whether in the guise of advertising, commercial graphics, illustration or signage.'³ Arguments about arguments that would seek to define Neo Rauch as a representative of East-German art in the lee of East-German history for an east art map. Yet however convincingly these affinities fit the local colour of the culture and geography, then all the more does this line of reasoning ignore other coordinates that are present in the paintings but don't only fit into a 'regional' context.

It is up to the viewers and their associative powers how many and which references come to the fore: mention has been made of Delvaux, Magritte and Schlemmer,⁴ elsewhere Giotto, Piero della Francesca, Garouste and Arno Rink have all been cited.⁵ The list could go on. The real point is that this rich array of references simply reflects the fact that Neo Rauch has engaged intensively with the history of painting — independent of the place or time of the origins of the painters in question.

This cultural and geographical scatter seems to address a very different realm — a notion of painting that has developed over the centuries regardless of nations and regions and seems to describe a very different territory — a territory on which specific regional and contemporary motifs and references do impinge and which can be made visible as such, but which is also part of a different order and contrariness of order, a territory that observes boundaries other than those drawn according to national and cultural-geographical precepts.

One of these boundaries denotes a realm — a territory — that owes its existence to the heterogeneity and dislocation of perspectives. Instead of bowing to the hierarchical nature of central perspective, close ups and distance views are wedged into each other; the proportions and relations between the motifs are solely a matter of pictorial composition and structure. In other words: the ordinarily

1. L. Cooke, 'Neo Rauch', in *Neo Rauch*, Hatje Cantz, Ostfildern 2002, p.8

2. H. Szeemann, 'Jury's Report', in *Neo Rauch*, *op. cit.*, 2002, p.5

3. L. Cooke, *op. cit.*, p.8

4. *Ibid.*, p.8

5. H. Kunde, 'Versprengte Einheiten', in *Neo Rauch*, Albertina, Hatje Cantz, Ostfildern 2004, n.p.

applicable boundaries between near and far, large and small, are suspended in order to put a limit on these same boundaries. And if necessary, colour and its distribution takes on a pictorial function that a motif cannot fulfil on the basis of its existing form or function. Another boundary defines what is connected and what is not: if the figures, the architectures and the props tell one or more stories simultaneously, the relationship between the colours occupies a very different level: that of the second, closer look. If there are not enough everyday objects, Rauch adds coloured prototypes of objects to the painting: tubular, bubble-like or simply amorphous chimeras. Objectless objects, objective objectlessness or non-representationalism. The very (natural) question as to the point, the meaning of the interplay of figures and props itself comes up against the borderline between the meaningful and the absurd. And yet, by their positioning and their colouration they fulfil a purpose, a visual purpose, an aesthetic purpose — following the compositional line, continuing an axis, intercepting and deflecting another. In the spirit of Merleau-Ponty one might ask where the borderline is between the eye and the spirit. The meanings that one might like to ascribe to the motifs run off the rails into the irrational, like meanings that have been forgotten somewhere along the way and now stand around uselessly, as mere templates of meaning. There's not much chat in Neo Rauch's paintings. If anything, there might be said to be an eloquent silence. Even the scraps of words or speech that occasionally crop up are interpreted as colourful notations. Nouns like *Fund* or *Unschuld* ('find', 'innocence') are no more than a sequence of individual letters, each dipped in its own colour and somehow just placed next to each other: *prima* (great!). Speech bubbles are added in an apparently logical manner, but these speech bubbles are left empty — like a thought on the tip of one's tongue but then held back, because sometimes keeping your peace is better than ... Pause for more thought. Another borderline. A borderline in human communication, a borderline that Wittgenstein drew between what one can say and what can only be shown. If need be, Rauch uses motifs that could have come straight out of an instruction leaflet: an arrow that indicates how something is to be understood, which step comes next, to the very limits of the user's understanding. Eye and spirit are not enough. And sometimes a picture is not enough. Certain figures and props crop up again and again. The same pose, the same persona. According to Freud it is not the unfamiliar things that strike us as uncanny (unhomely) but those we know all too well. References? Yes, one might recall the work of Brice Marden, or René Daniels. Kippenberger, maybe. Or the naïve hopes of the constructivists, hoping to hone in on an idea by restricting themselves to the basic colours of truth and purity. With hindsight, the aesthetics of the post-war period — with its colours and rounded forms — look like an attempt to see constructivism through the eyes of a child. A love of life, upholstered and wallpapered. Perhaps there were too few pictures in those post-war years, so reality itself was treated like a picture. A praxis that made no distinction between East and West. Oh, but I nearly forgot Mike Kelley, and Edward Hopper. Showy shop windows. Show rooms. Due to the large formats that Rauch uses, his pictures don't only hang on the wall, some stand on the ground, airing their ideas. Leaving aside those museum spaces that have such high ceilings that everything hangs on the walls, facing us.

What still faces us here is the question of painting as a medium. A senseless question, if the only aim is to look for alternative media. Why not photography, why not film or drama given that painting is already so old and has so often been declared dead, only to be brought back to life with a new appetite? A zombie medium. A post-mortal medium. Neo Rauch's decision to make painting his medium has often been

discussed. Sometimes the argument runs along cultural and geographical lines: 'That Rauch's work takes the form of painting as distinct from those elaborately constructed fictions so eponymous in contemporary photography, video and film is telling. It is at once a testimony of faith in painting as an art form with a long and esteemed lineage, particularly in that region of the world from which the artist originates, and an implicit critique of the limitations of the camera-based arts.'⁶ One could be forgiven for deducing from this that the decision in favour of a particular medium automatically brushes aside any others or at least casts them in a suspicious light. Should Rauch's choice of painting as his medium be interpreted as a declaration of allegiance to painting — painting, to prove that it is still possible to paint? If that were the case, then painting really would be in a state of crisis. However, the fact that people are still painting in but not only in 'that region of the world from which the artist originates' obviates the need for an answer to this question. And the other story, of how one medium affects another, is not disputed. How long was it that photography took its lead from the pictorial language of painting and, in return, how complex are the influences of photography, film and television on the history of painting? What kind of perception would we be dealing with if this were predicated on one medium alone? Particularly in the case of work such as that of Neo Rauch, which is laden with references to the everyday world with furniture, with architecture, with pictures, with panoramic views, with history, with typologies, with technologies — all open to collage and montage — it would be well nigh impossible to define its legitimacy solely within the context of the medium with and in which it has developed. Accordingly I should prefer not to venture an answer to the — obsolete — question as to why Neo Rauch paints and takes neither photographs nor makes films. He paints, and that's that. Much more interesting than the question as to why he paints is why he paints the *way* he paints.

Mention has already been made of the heterogeneity of the perspectives and the interwedging spaces, of the shift between colour and narrative structures. This method — casting doubt on the notion of a homogenous space with intrinsically logical orders and figures — is shared by Rauch and other fellow artists. Names like Kippenberger and Kentridge have already come up; others could be added. Since the intention here is not to locate Neo Rauch's work in a field of similarities and points of comparison, prior to extrapolating from this the singular achievement that is Rauch's, may a certain degree of thrift in this respect be allowed. Modernism — in crisis in the East and the West alike — has also already been mentioned. As yet we have not touched on a now precarious identity, in other words the precarious situation in which 'subjects' — citizens — in both the East and West now find themselves, because the state's promises of possible identities have not only lost credibility but their untenability has also become an everyday truth. Assuming our topic here was the realisation that the promises and their promised pegs no longer fit each other. Assuming that the promises of a cultural, political or economic nature were constantly invoking a picture of the future without ever actually delivering the appropriate picture. The cultural and political situation in the postwar period can be described as a picture made from a wealth of motifs, only the canvas these were to be transferred onto was kept back. A picture without a picture. No need to add here that with time even the richest motifs became ever more meagre such that the lack of a picture carrier became ever more obvious. If the picture carrier is regarded as the picture ground and used as a metaphor to describe the lack of grounds or ground for a picture, for a picture of society or for a concept of identity in a groundless picture of society, then the desire for a picture with grounds and a ground is perfectly

6. L. Cooke, *op. cit.*, p.9

understandable. There is a minor point of information here relevant to the matter of the large formats used by Neo Rauch. These formats provide a ground (or grounds) that is not merely a picture ground. By virtue of its size the painting intervenes in the very nature of the space — painting as a tool to shape one's environment, you might say. But the point here is that this ersatz spatial logic is not used to draw an illusionistic veil over the missing ground(s). The heterogeneity of the perspectives, the fluid nature of the relations between the narrative figures, the contradictions and the chimeras, the absurd and the all-too familiar remain in place — as though Rauch had collected together the scattered pictorial promises of the last decades and were now meticulously placing them like an archive in a picture gallery. Nothing is prettified, everything is documented (albeit in paintings and not photographs). Yet these motifs are not enough to provide the answer to the question concerning a credible identity.

Identity is sketched in here on the basis of isolation, contradiction, absurdity and a refusal to communicate. Only the picture ground, the shared carrier, proposes a context where none would appear to be. If the episodes and the people in Neo Rauch's paintings pass each other by without anything more than passing interest, then the reason is a notion of identity that is in a position to grasp the dilemma of a non-relationship as an element of identity and of reality. In that sense the canvas becomes the prototype of an identity that insists that non-sequiturs and contradictions are on the same level spatially and chronologically, that they have to share the same space and time.

The task Rauch's pictures set the viewer is not to ignore the pictorial elements that don't 'fit', but precisely the opposite, to make a connection between elements that either have nothing to say to each other or remain alien to each other. The canvas as a prototype for identity finds itself faced with the task of discovering an order for a situation that has already seen too much order to want to breathe new life into it again, and too little to be able to arrive at a consensual solution. We have already hinted at this double regime in Rauch's paintings. With Robert Musil in one's baggage, one might talk of a parallel action, where the aim is to counteract the differences of meaning and shifting senses on the level of motive by means of a painterly language of forms and colours. What may appear absurd in terms of figures and props, may on a painterly level produce a picture that makes a great deal of sense. It is up to the viewers whether they wander between these two levels or see them at work in their simultaneity.

Talking of wandering to and fro, this applies not only within one painting and between its various levels, but also to the path from one painting to the next. Inscribed into this path is the handwriting of Neo Rauch — a hand that recognisably arranges the works one after the other, drawing a line painting by painting. Without seeking to invoke the conspiracy theories of one such as Thomas Pynchon, nevertheless the title of one of his books seems to capture perfectly the programme of Neo Rauch's handwriting: *Gravity's Rainbow* (translated into German by Elfriede Jelinek with equal freedom and beauty as *Die Enden der Parabel*). Anyone who has ever seen a work by Neo Rauch, or maybe two, will already be developing a feeling for the underlying parable by the time they come to the third. What we find at the ends of the parable (the rainbow?) is an imagined identity — the notion of a subject that finds him or herself in the position to bring together the aforesaid contradictions, gaps and incompatibilities in the medium of painting and to order them in such a way that a picture comes out at the other end, that never appears as such and which is only present between the paintings and as the viewer

paces from one painting to the next: an unpainted picture from a whole series of painted pictures, an unpainted picture to convey a notion of 'subjectivity.' If that means that identity cannot directly be portrayed as such, and only indirectly makes its presence felt between the paintings, then this is not because this identity is so very sublime that it is not to be grasped. Rather the identity sketched in here between the paintings draws strength from establishing a relationship between the subject and his or her surroundings. It's not about painting reality as it is or as it is received, neither realism nor simplistic emotional metaphors. It cannot be a matter of arriving at a psychogram of the artist from his paintings. On the contrary, the discussion should focus on whether it is still viable, in a social, cultural and political context, to take an individualistic approach to the contradictions and gaps — in order to give the individual subject a chance. Taking a stand and expressing it: a stand that is unmistakable, recognisable, negotiable and communicable — and if necessary adding the name and address, like Neo Rauch and Leipzig.

That in itself has rather little to do with an 'east art map'. The concept of painting, which this text seeks to support, raises the question as to the possibility of identity — identity as the promise that a subject will be able to express something very individualistic, even if this means that attention turns to the complex history of a medium, the history of a region, of a country, of a socio-political genesis, etc. In that sense painting has a political core, in the assertion and in the proof of the possibility of this assertion of identity. That the identity of the originator of a picture consequently remains unpainted may sound paradoxical. The handwriting we are talking of here is not the written record of a soul, the oily cast of a supposed internal landscape, but the promise made by a subject and as a subject that is promised. Were the subject not directly present and were it not possible to see into it and eye to eye with it, it would not be promised and the paintings would no longer be pictures, just the fingerprints of one person. Circumstantial evidence. The fact that the security services' thirst for fingerprints is currently at such a high level, means that the attempt to detach a subject's handwriting from his or her fingerprints is all the more admirable — although that may sound too much like Pynchon, so it should be regarded as no more than a brief aside.

The ends of Rauch's parable point to a gravitational force in painting that is in the position to promise the possibility of an identity for the individual subject. This promise is far from teleological, nor does it herald a future where the subject might perhaps find his or her place once again. This promise sets limits on the future, for it can only be realised in the present. This promise sets limits on the art of map making, because it can only ever happen between different maps.

Translated from German by Fiona Elliott

Paweł Althamer: A New Pied Piper

Charles Esche

For he led us, he said, to a joyous land,
Joining the town and just at hand,
Where waters gushed and fruit-trees grew,
And flowers put forth a fairer hue,
And everything was strange and new;
The sparrows were brighter than peacocks here,
And their dogs outran our fallow deer,
And honey-bees had lost their stings,
And horses were born with eagles' wings;
And just as I became assured
My lame foot would be speedily cured,
The music stopped and I stood still,
And found myself outside the hill,
Left alone against my will,
To go now limping as before,
And never hear of that country more!

Robert Browning, The Pied Piper of Hamelin: A Child's Story,
first published in 1849
www.ims.uni-stuttgart.de/~jonas/browning.html

Browning, like many before and after, uses a mediaeval folktale to talk about liberation, greed, fantasy and fear in his contemporary world. As Brecht, Apollinaire, Marina Tsvetaeva and others, he takes liberties with the Pied Piper / Rattenfänger tale in order to speak about something else. For this figure of the stranger, the classic outsider who arrives from nowhere and disappears just as mysteriously, is a deep-rooted trope for societal disturbance. He embodies both the threat and the promise of the unknown, his skill as an artist and provider of public service (clearing out the rats) is balanced by his steadfast rejection of the burghers attempts to lower his payment and his elegant punishment of their deceit (leading the children into the mountain). As a metaphor, the Pied Piper cuts an uncertain figure. He can be understood as both Christ and The Devil, or the Sun and Death, at one and the same time. He seems to contain both life-giving and life-taking possibilities and even in his powerful rendition of the lame boy's sorrow, Browning does not clarify whether it is a delusion or not.

It is precisely this ambivalence of identity that secures a relationship between our piping hero or villain and the work of Paweł Althamer, one that I will expand on

in this short text. Given the instability of the signifier 'Pied Piper', and also given that he performs the role of both outsider and popular leader (as charmer and avenger of injustice), he seems consummately appropriate to use as a way of imagining what Althamer does and could do. To start with, any close encounter with a work of Paweł Althamer is always slightly destabilising. We are never quite sure which side he is on, or which point he is making. When he climbs a tree and lives in his home-made arboreal shelter for hours, even days, we don't know if he is inviting us to join him or trying to get away from the hell of other people (*House on the Tree* 2001). When he smokes dope in the bath wearing a cardinal's hat, we are not sure of his attitude to the church — is this an ironic critique or an attempt to excavate some of the essential radicalism that might still persist in organised Christianity (*Cardinal* 1998)? When he invited Polish workers to Austria, was he exhibiting the contradictions of the European system or taking advantage of both his hosts and his invited guests (*Worker* 2002)? When he brings his children and their friends to Maastricht to be looked after by the museum, is he serious about his work as critique or simply exploiting the invitation to help his family (*Blokers* 2004)?

In these questions, there is a greater ambivalence than the familiar contemporary art fallback of saying 'it's up to the viewer to decide on the meaning'. Our uncertain reaction is not born of simple puzzlement but rather of a quizzical moral position. The question is more 'who does the artist think he is?' rather than 'what is he trying to say?' This seems to be exactly the same reaction that the good burghers had towards the Pied Piper after he had rid the town of its rats — and the Piper's reaction seems to be a kind of bemused but sad determination rather than an interest to debate our reaction. At least if we understand the Piper's actions not as vengeance on the adults but as a liberation of the children from such mean-spirited parents. Such an attitude would appear quite close to the persuasive persistence with which Althamer approaches his quizzical audience.

Before we ascribe such motivation to the artist however, let us be clear that it is very possible that Althamer doesn't know who he thinks he is, but is rather intrigued by the possibility that he might find out through these subtle provocations. It also appears probable, given his acceptance of the artist's mantle, that the subject under examination in his work is as much the art field itself and its clichéd notion of the freedom of the artist. What does that freedom amount to, if not the right to act in exclusive ways and to offer some people tangible benefits in its name — and if not to offer those benefits to your family and the people closest to you, then to whom else?

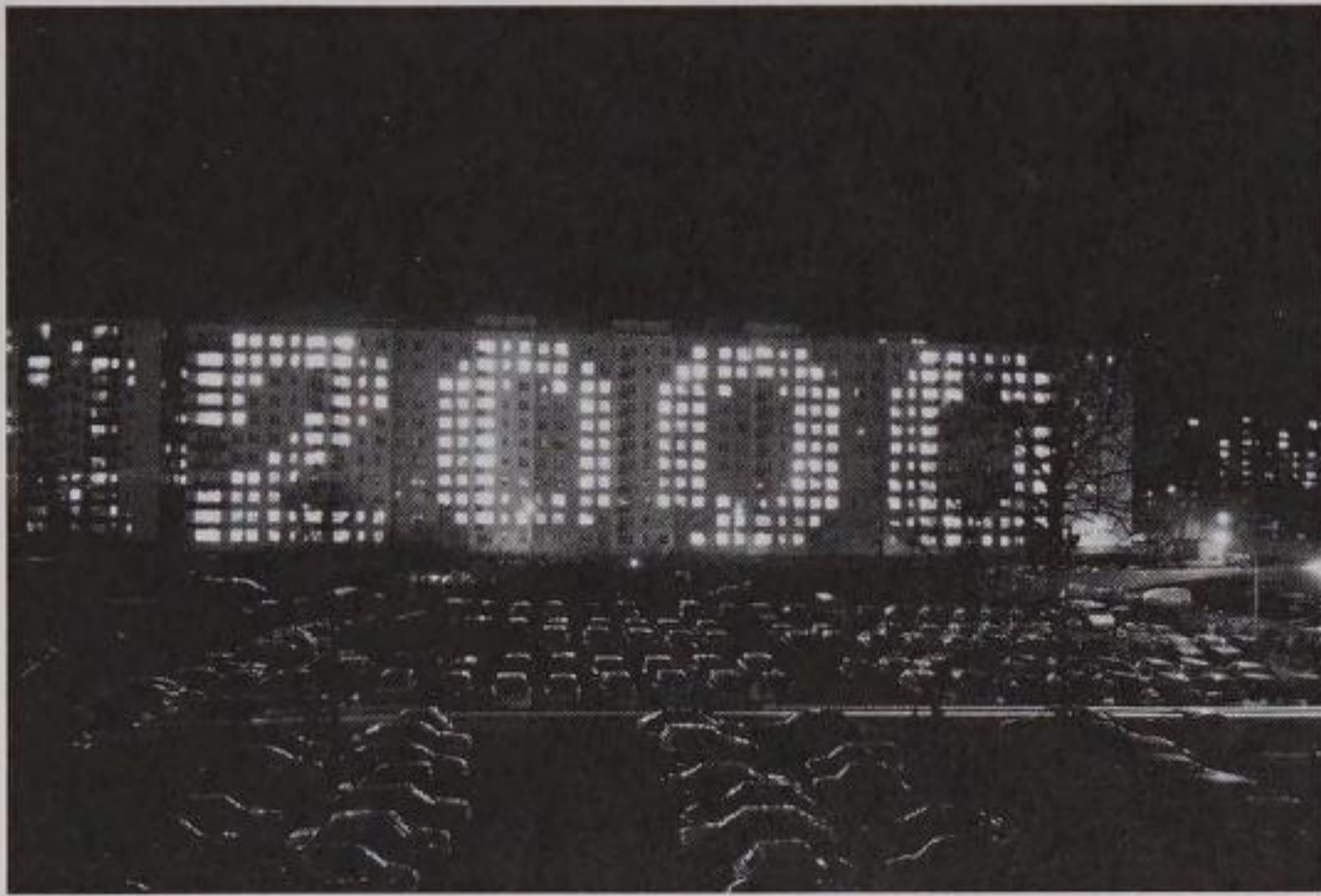
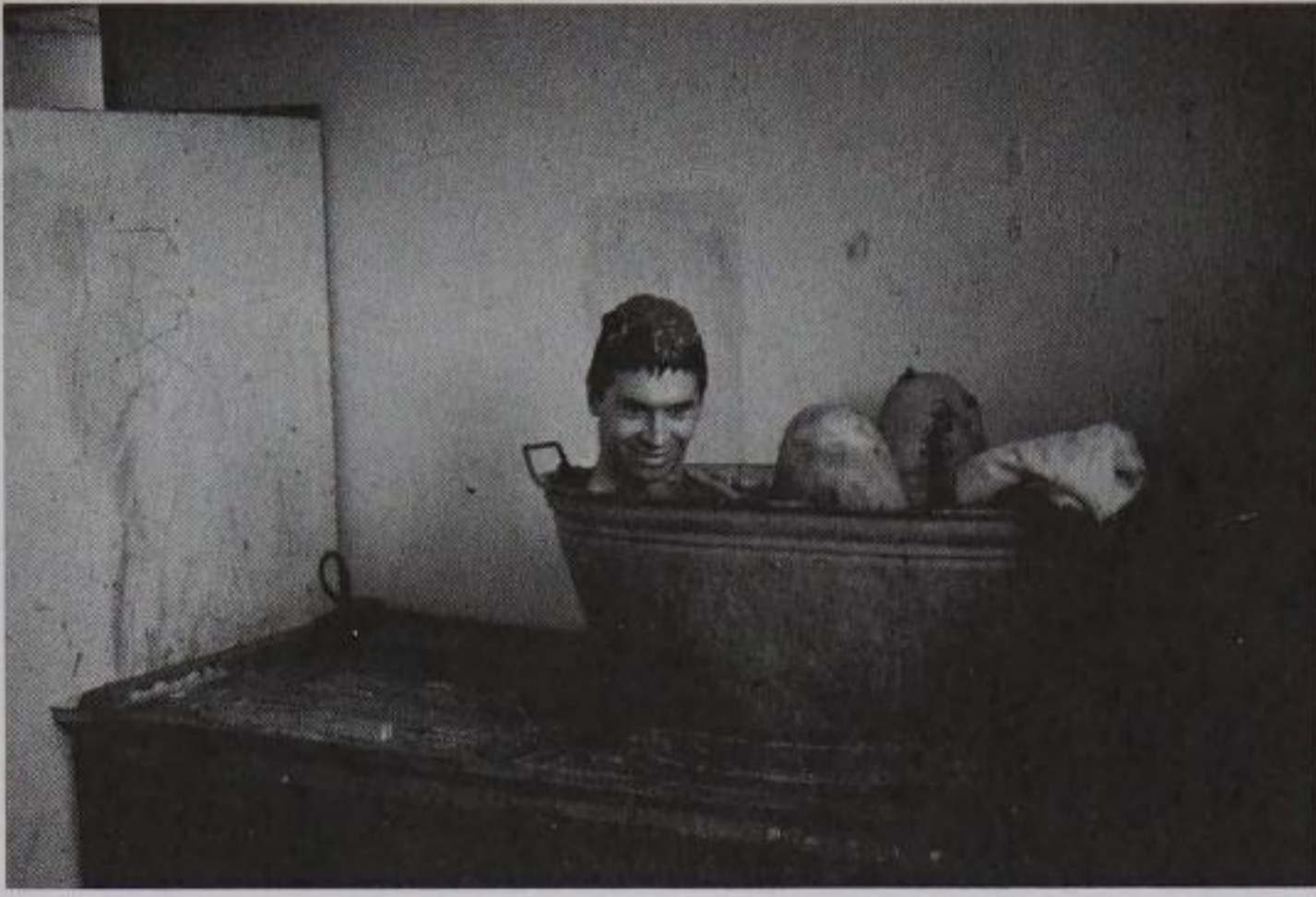
But there is much more to the Althamer-Piper analogy than simply one of the figure of the mysterious liberator or renegade artist. If we look at other literary uses of the folktale, we find some interesting reflections on the artist's own approaches. In 1914, Apollinaire published 'Le Musicien de Saint-Merry'.¹ Though not explicitly mentioning Hamelin, the story is clearly adapted from the Pied Piper. However, Apollinaire places the events of his poem on 21 May 1913, close to the date of its creation and therefore applicable to the contemporary moment. The musician in the poem leads a group of the town's women into an old factory with broken windows where they all disappear. By placing this magical occurrence in the here and now, Apollinaire exploits a technique defined by Baudelaire as 'surnaturalism'. This condition of 'a state of perception which intensifies the existence of things, makes them hyperbolically themselves' seems to apply to much of the Pied Piper tale, especially in its repeated use of a specific date and location, traditionally on 26 June 1284 in Hameln (near Hannover) according to a wall inscription in the city itself. This precision about a real date and place makes the appearance of the 'miracle' or

1. In G. Apollinaire, *Calligrammes: Poems of Peace and War*, University of California Press, Los Angeles 1980, pp. 384-6

'curse' all the more wondrous. The Piper becomes the agent for a 'supernatural' moment because he sensitises his subjects to their everyday surroundings (as with the lame boy ascribing a beautiful harmony to the natural world). Life itself becomes open to the possibility of unpredictable transformation or fantastic release.

To see Althamer's work through the lens of 'supernaturalism' is surely to understand a fundamental aspect of his approach. When he announces that he will not appear at a certain time in a certain place (*Invisible in Berlin Alexanderplatz on 28/06/02 between 17:00–19:00*), he creates a new state of perception that intensifies the urban banality. Alexanderplatz becomes 'hyperbolically itself' for a moment as people look out for his familiar figure, introduced to us already in his many self-portraits. The same is true of his urban performances in which people are instructed to behave quite 'normally' in public, or even in his simple instruction to turn lights on or off in his own apartment block to spell a huge '2000' on a dull day in February of that year. The 'supernaturalism' of his *Documenta X* performance *Astronaut* 1997, in which he walked through Kassel dressed as an astronaut and then invited a homeless Pole to live in a wooden caravan for the exhibition's duration, is, I hope, self-explanatory. Through the work we are invited to see the familiar anew, in a way that causes a compulsive estrangement while being materially unaffected.

My final pitch for comparison between the Piper and Althamer is less absolute because it is based on a crucial difference — the Piper is a folk literary device and Althamer is a living personality. What they both share is an ambiguity as to their effects on their environment. In the most original versions of the story, it is never clear whether the Piper represents a good or evil influence over the town and its children. Instead, and rather like Althamer too, the Piper seems capable of containing the possibility of both qualities in one identity. Both are rather like mediaeval wandering sages with a wisdom that is not quite of this world even while it is not necessarily religious. However, Althamer as a real person draws his own intimate circle of family and friends into his work. His relationships with people are always at stake. Whether he uses himself, his wife, children or his wider family, they are all part of his expressive language, and in laying these relationships open, he also includes us as spectators more intimately into his world. We are never quite sure where the line between Althamer the artist and Paweł the human being is drawn. He places his charm, his magnetism and his wisdom at our disposal. Like the Piper, however, his seduction comes at a cost to both parties. We see it in the way he returns the scrutiny of outsiders back to them with his naked sculptures of the artist and his wife with a video camera (*Adam and Eve* 2002). We see it also in his desire to escape to his treehouse (*House on the Tree* 2001). But finally, we see the trade between attraction and manipulation in the way he calls other people into his work whether as participants or implicated viewers. The workers, the homeless, passers-by, children and family are all present. He seems to want to lead them (and us) somewhere, but the destination is never clear, or perhaps only, in the words of the lame boy, to a place where 'everything is strange and new'.



Clockwise from top left:

Paweł Althamer
Cardinal
1998, courtesy Foksal
Gallery Foundation

Paweł Althamer
House on the Tree
2001, courtesy Foksal
Gallery Foundation

Paweł Althamer
2000
2000, courtesy Foksal
Gallery Foundation

Subversive Affirmation: On Mimesis as a Strategy of Resistance

Inke Arns, Sylvia Sasse

Since the second half of the 1990s we have been witnessing an increasing use of subversive affirmation in contemporary media and net activist contexts. Thinking about projects and artists like Heath Bunting, -Innen, Christoph Schlingensief, ubermorgen, etoy, 0100101110101101.org and The Yes Men it becomes clear that they have all (more or less successfully) made use of the tactics of resistance through apparent affirmation of — and compliance with — the image, corporate identity and strategies of their opponents. In February 2005 an entire conference dedicated to 'Strategies of (In)Visibility' explored the fact that effective (artistic/activist) actions can exist without exposure.¹ However, what is utterly remarkable is that on closer inspection a lot of these projects seem to draw, although this is never explicitly formulated, on artistic tactics of diversion developed in Eastern Europe, or more precisely, in various Eastern European socialist countries since the 1960s.

Our thesis is that the methods of subversive affirmation and over-identification that have developed since the 1960s, particularly in Eastern European art, were later — i.e. after 1989 — increasingly understood in the West, appropriated, and carried over to other areas, such as (media) activism. We are claiming that these tactics of subversive affirmation and over-identification, initially adopted by way of necessity in socialist Eastern Europe and later deliberately chosen, led to an 'art of practice' and to forms of action and performance art that became an influential 'Eastern import' into the West throughout the 1990s.

Since the late 1920s, these artistic tactics have intentionally developed in so-called repressive political situations. It seems almost as if the genesis of such tactics could only have taken place in the face of a totalitarian machine. So, why then, one could ask, are these tactics that have developed in one, openly repressive context, today becoming important again, in a different — political, social, economic — context that is supposedly more liberal?

While in the context of openly repressive systems there were very narrow limits on what could and what could not be said, today we are confronted with a situation where everything (and thus nothing) can be said. The culture industry manages to co-opt and appropriate even the most critical viewpoints and render them ineffective. In both contexts, critical distance (an 'outside') proves to be an impossible or inadequate position. In this situation brought about by the strategy of total recovery and appropriation of critical viewpoints by the dominant political and economic system is rather the viral stealth tactics of subversive affirmation that still seem to hold a potential for resistance.

1. 'Strategies of (In)Visibility', in *Republicart*, Goldsmiths College/Camden Arts Centre, London 2005

Subversive Affirmation: Affirmation as Subversion

Subversive affirmation is an artistic/political tactic that allows artists/activists to take part in certain social, political, or economic discourses and to affirm, appropriate, or consume them while simultaneously undermining them. It is characterised precisely by the fact that with affirmation there is simultaneously taking place a distancing from, or revelation of what is being affirmed. In subversive affirmation there is always a surplus which destabilises affirmation and turns it into its opposite.

Subversive affirmation and over-identification — as ‘tactics of explicit consent’ — are forms of critique that through techniques of affirmation, involvement and identification put the viewer/listener precisely in such a state or situation which she or he would or will criticise later. What the various tactics and parasitical practices have in common is that they employ the classical aesthetical methods of: imitation, simulation, mimicry and camouflage in the sense of ‘becoming invisible’ by disappearing into the background.

The term subversive affirmation appeared in the context of Moscow Conceptualism and described the literary practices developed by Vladimir Sorokin. In the late 1980s and early 1990s Sorokin wrote stories and novels in the style of the nineteenth century novel (*Roman*) or in the style of socialist realism (*Tridcataja ljubov' Mariny*). Ultimately, these novels and stories always collapse because of their own over-serious realism.² Here, the concept of ‘imitative exaggeration’ characterises a strategy with which — according to Hirt and Wonders — the ‘post-avant-garde distills the implied violence and insanity out of the collective discourse and articulates it.’³ In Sorokin’s texts subversive affirmation is ‘repetition’ as ‘re-enactment’ of totalitarian and ideological practices and ‘at the same time their alienation, or estrangement (*Verfremdung*)’.⁴ It is an exposure, a ‘parroting’ and ‘rumination,’ it is the ‘discourse residing in the language of the discourse’.⁵ But Sorokin was obviously not the inventor of these practices. Rather, in his literary concept he appropriated and accumulated different techniques of the late Russian avant-garde, early Moscow Conceptualism, Laibach and other groups that had been developing similar tactics independently.

Since the early 1970s affirmative elements have been present in all areas of unofficial art in the former Eastern Bloc. These strategies, initially adopted by way of necessity (i.e. underground) in socialist Eastern Europe and later chosen deliberately, led to a special ‘art of practice’. Some examples of this Eastern European ‘art of practice’ in the 1970s, were, Anatoly Zhigalov’s *Komandantskie raboty* (*Commander’s Works*) (Russia), *Supporting the Country’s Wheat Cultivation* by the Russian group Gnezdo and *Collector of Merits* by Paul Neagu (Romania). In the 1980s the strategies of self-collectivisation and over-identification on the part of the Slovenian group Laibach/NSK, the state-affirmative actions of The Orange Alternative in Poland, Muchomorj’s *Evenings Commemorating Lieutenant Rzhiveskij*, the *River Purifications* of Chempiony Mira (both Russian), and, in the 1990s, the participation in the election by the Governmentally Independent Control Commission in Moscow (by the Radek Group) or Rassim Krastev’s work on his ‘West Body’ (Bulgaria).

Looking at these various forms of affirmative practice we can differentiate between an abstract, structural affirmation, and a more concrete citation of contents. Typical of Moscow Conceptualism, besides Sorokin, is a structural repetition of totalitarian practices. Ilya Kabakov for instance built ‘total installations’, in which he implemented the ‘mechanism of “double” action work — the experiencing of the illusion and simultaneously the introspection of it.’⁶ In their actions, installations and texts, the Medical Hermeneutics developed a specific ‘ideo-technique’

2. Michel Foucault, for instance, spoke of the ‘possibility of a non-positive affirmation’ that contemporary philosophy had discovered, an affirmation that affirms nothing, an affirmation without any transitivity — not a negation, but rather a direction to the border ‘at which the ontological decision is made’. M. Foucault, ‘Vorrede zur Überschreitung’, in Michel Foucault, *Von der Subversion des Wissens*, Fischer, Frankfurt/Main 1991, p. 33

3. G. Hirt, S. Wonders, ‘Legenden, die nicht enden’, in *Schreibheft. Zeitschrift für Literatur* 42, November 1993, p. 35

4. S. Sasse, *Texte in Aktion. Sprech- und Sprachakte im Moskauer Konzeptualismus*, Fink (Wilhelm), Munich 2003, p. 14

5. S. Sasse, C. Schramm, ‘Totalitäre Literatur und subversive Affirmation’, in *Die Welt der Slaven* LXII, 1997, pp. 306–27

6. I. Kabakov, *On the ‘Total’ Installation*, Cantz, Ostfildern 1995, p. 245



Pomaranczowa Alternatywa
(Orange Alternative)
Wrocław, 22 February 1990
happening
Source: fototapeta.art.pl/fti-
dementi.html

TOTART
(Natalia Abalakova,
Anatoly Zhigalov)
Subotnik po zakladyvaniju,
'allei avantgarda' (*Subotnik*
for the foundation of the
'Avenue of the Avant-Garde')
Moscow, October 1982

(ideotekhnika) which they called the 'science of ideological production and ideological creation'.⁷ As a result, the ideo-technique of every medical hermeneutical discourse shows its own 'ideodelik', its hallucinatory, irrational reverse. Exploring collective situations, the group Collective Actions involved the participants in precisely such a state or situation that she or he would later criticise. One of their most well-known actions is *Desjat' pojavlenij* (*Ten Apparitions*), 1 February 1981. It took place — like most of this groups actions — on a white, snow-covered field on the outskirts of Moscow. Ten participants were led near a construction holding ten reels of 200 to 300 metres of wire. Taking one end of the wire with them, they were told to walk away radially into the forest surrounding the field ('Comrades, start processing the space!'). When they reached the end of the wire they were instructed to roll up the wire until a small piece of cardboard attached to the wire appeared. On this cardboard the title of the action, the date and the time were given — nothing more. Left alone without any instructions of what to do next, some participants returned to the field, happily rejoining the collective (like Ilya Kabakov), while others simply went home but could not help thinking that everything they encountered on their way home was part of the plan/concept (an uneasy feeling). Conceived as estranged participation or involving alienation, this tactic reveals how the targeted discourse, the discourse of collectivity or collectivism, functions without distancing itself from it. Thus, when speaking of subversive affirmation we are not dealing with critical distance but are confronted with a critique of aesthetic experience that — via identification — is about creating a physical / psychic experience of what is being criticized.

While Moscow Conceptualism analysed the structure of totalitarian practices, other groups like TOTART (Anatoly Zhigalov and Natalia Abalakova), Gnezdo (Nest), Chempiony mira (World Champions) or Muchomory (Toadstools) worked with totalitarian practices, estranging their contents. Typical examples are the re-enactments of subotniks (since the early 1920s subotniks regularly took place on

Saturday as 'voluntary workdays' in which whole cities often participated). In 1982 for instance, Anatoly Zhigalov organised a *Golden Subotnik* in Moscow.⁸ At that time he worked as a janitor (*kommandant*) in a housing block and was thus in the position to officially organise a voluntary workday. But Zhigalov's workday deviated slightly from the norm. He did not order the participants to remove weeds from the ground or rake beds, but called on them to paint benches with the colour gold. The residents, accustomed to following the commander's directives, obeyed this unusual task. Thus, the workday was being transformed into an act of pure wastefulness. (Consequently, Zhigalov was arrested and sent to a psychiatric hospital).

The group Chempiony mira organised comparable acts of sabotage in 1987–8, for example, *Gigiena Poberezh'ja* (*Hygiene on the Shore*), *Bereg* (*Shore*), *Nostalgija po chistote* (*Nostalgia for Cleanliness*). All these actions were part of the series *Preventivnaja Geografija* (*Preventive Geography*).⁹ In *Hygiene on the Shore*, for instance, they cleaned two kilometres of Koktebel's (Krim) shoreline by shampooing and wiping the rocks, and in *Nostalgia for Cleanliness* they transformed 'hygienic practices into the ecology of culture'. Obviously, all these 'subotniks' quoted the Stalinist idea of purification by giving it a new content. Through this systematical devaluation the purification became concrete, cute, and ridiculous.¹⁰

In all these actions artists worked with affirmative tactics which partly (in content or in structure) repeated socialist realist practices like purification, jubilation, and the creation of a collective body. Moreover it was the installations of Kabakov, the actions of Collective Actions and the texts by Vladimir Sorokin that, in addition, repeated the aesthetic conditions of totalitarian aesthetics; the elimination of any kind of outside viewpoint (i.e. outside the artistic work). This complete removal of the visitors', viewers' or readers' horizon is the central principle of totalitarian aesthetics and at the same time the only structural basis on which subversive affirmation can succeed as subversive affirmation. Subversive affirmation has to — almost physically — involve the listener or reader in the situation so that she or he can understand her or his involvement afterwards and reflect upon it.

The Orange Alternative, Voting Yes Twice

In Wrocław, Poland, the Orange Alternative based around Waldemar Frydrych practised a slightly different type of subversive affirmation. Operating in 1987–8, the loose group developed what George Branchflower calls 'socialist surrealism'.¹¹ Making no explicit demands at all (unlike Solidarity), it adopted the strategy of directly challenging the State apparatus' monopoly on Truth on the streets. Close to the Situationist practice of creating situations, The Orange Alternative managed to involve ordinary people in their 'happenings' (on occasions attracting the participation of up to 13,000 people). On 1 October 1987, the happening *Who's afraid of Toilet Paper* was staged, 'Focusing on one of the primary espoused functions of the State as one of redistributing the social product, the decision was made to aid the authorities in their task — redistribution begins at home.'¹² Members of The Orange Alternative solemnly distributed single sheets of toilet paper to passers-by.

Let us share it justly. Let justice begin from toilet paper. Socialism, with its extravagant distribution of goods, as well as an eccentric social posture, has put toilet paper at the forefront of people's dreams. Are the queues for toilet paper an expression of (a) a call for culture? (b) the call of nature? (c) the leading role of the party in a society of developed socialism? Tick the right answer.

7. P. Pepperstejn, *Slovar' terminov moskovskoj konceptual'noj shkoly*, Andrej Monastyrsky, Moscow 1999, p.43

8. The action was part of the series *Komandantskaja rabota* (*Commander's Work*) performed in 1982.

9. The Chempiony mira group was founded in 1986 by G. Abramishvili, K. Zvezdochetov, B. Matrosov, K. Latyshev and A. Jachnin.

10. The Muchomor group (founded in 1978) performed similar actions. Wolfgang Weitlaner calls the understatement comprised in their work the practice of 'inverse sublime'. W. Weitlaner, 'Private Umsturzversuche. Zur Strategie des Umgekehrten Erhabenen im Werk des Moskauer Künstlers und Schriftstellers Konstantin Zvezdochetov', in C. Götz, A. Otto, R. Vogt (eds.), *Romantik — Moderne — Postmoderne*, Frankfurt/Main 1998, pp. 352–86

11. G. Branchflower, 'Oranges and Lemons', in *Here and Now*, n°7/8, Autumn 1988, www.drifline.org/cgi-bin/archive/archive.cgi?list=spoon-archives/avant-garde.archive/papers/orange.txt

12. *Ibid.*

13. Inversely, during the early 1990s Russian Actionism imported Western tactics of political resistance into Russia. Alexander Brener, for instance, tried to invade the ministry of defence like a 1970s house squatter, or he invited Boris Yeltsin to engage in a boxing contest in Red Square. In 1993 Osmolovsky and the group Nezesüdik celebrated the 100th birthday of Mao Tse-tung in the Moscow department store GUM. Dressed in black overalls and with dollar bank notes stuck in front of their mouths they tried to roar in vain 'war' and 'dictatorship'. In the mid-1990s several political parties were created: gallery owner Marat Guelman organised the project 'Instant party', Anatoly Osmolovsky invented the 'panic party', Aleksander Brener the 'party of the unguidable torpedos', Oleg Kulik the 'party of the animals'. Later they organised demonstrations and barricades in the style of 1968. But soon a general aversion against simulative and affirmative practices became apparent. Brener and also Osmolovsky recognised that if one wants to leave the artistic playing field one must break out of the 'quotation skin'.

14. See I. Arns, *Neue Slowenische Kunst (NSK) – eine Analyse ihrer künstlerischen Strategien im Kontext der 1980er Jahre in Jugoslawien*, Museum Ostdeutsche Galerie, Regensburg 2002

15. Laibach, quoted in C. Wahjudi, 'Zwölf Jahre musikalische

7 October was the official day of the police and security service in Poland. This time, Wrocław youth under the banner of The Orange Alternative decided to march to demonstrate their appreciation of these public servants for 'doing their duty with a smile', showering police officers and patrol cars with flowers. Attempts to embrace the police and thank them were met with reasonable force and some arrests. During the referendum on social policy held on 27 November 1987, The Orange Alternative demonstrated and called on Wrocław to be the city with a 200% turnout: 'Vote Yes Twice'. During the Nowa Huta strikes in 1988 a letter was read out to the workers giving support to strikes in the most fulsome terms. The author of the letter was Lenin. Stalinist hymns were sung by a crowd that gathered around the chimpanzee cage in the Wrocław Zoo. Such 'happenings' continued throughout Poland, in Wrocław, Poznań, Gdansk, Krakow and Warsaw during 1988.¹³

Over-Identification — The Ultimate Form of Subversive Affirmation

Completely independently from the developments in Russia and Poland, the Slovenian group Laibach that originally called itself Laibach Kunst developed the tactic of over-identification. In 1984, together with the painters' collective IRWIN, the Scipion Nasice Sisters Theatre (today called Cosmokinetic Cabinet Noordung), and the design department New Collectivism (NK), the group co-founded the artists' collective Neue Slowenische Kunst (NSK). Founded in 1980 in Yugoslavia, Laibach became notorious for their 'hyper-literal repetition of the totalitarian ritual' (Gržinić 2004). The tactic of over-identification is, if you wish, subversive affirmation in its ultimate form because it manages to create an absolute totality. Nowhere is this as visible as in the work of the group Laibach (and NSK).

The tactic of NSK¹⁴ did not formulate itself in an openly critical discourse of the state and its ideology; nor did it distance itself from ideology through irony or ironic negation. On the contrary, it was about a repetition, an appropriation of components and elements of the ruling ideology, a game with these 'ready-mades', an adoption of existing ruling codes in order to — according to Laibach — 'answer these languages with themselves'.¹⁵ As the Situationists said, the spectacle can only be subverted by being taken literally. With Laibach and NSK, we are dealing with a subversive strategy that Slavoj Žižek termed a radical 'over-identification'¹⁶ with the 'hidden reverse' of the ruling ideology regulating social relationships. By employing every identifying element delivered either explicitly or implicitly by the official ideology, Laibach Kunst and later Neue Slowenische Kunst appeared on stage and in public as an organisation that seemed 'even more total than totalitarianism'¹⁷ — a provocative reference to the Yugoslav system.¹⁸

According to Peter Sloterdijk and Slavoj Žižek, overtly criticising the ideology of a system misses the point because today every ideological discourse is marked by cynicism. This means that the ideological discourse has become internalised, and thus anticipates its own critique. Consequently, *vis-à-vis* a cynical ideology, according to Žižek, irony becomes something that 'plays into the hands of power'. In such a situation what is most feared by the ruling ideology is 'excessive identification...: the enemy is the "fanatic" who "over-identifies" instead of keeping an adequate distance.'¹⁹ NSK 'frustrates' the system (the ruling ideology) precisely insofar as it is not its ironic imitation, but over-identification with it — by bringing to light the obscene superego underside of the system, over-identification suspends its efficiency.'²⁰ Over-identification makes explicit the implications of an ideology and thus produces such elements that may not be publicly formulated in order for an ideology to reproduce itself. Georg Witte writes something similar concerning the



technique of subversive affirmation: 'By radicalising a "plan" in its realisation, subversive affirmation unveils the ideological concept underlying this plan.'²¹

In March 1989, Laibach played in the Yugoslav capital Belgrade. Before the concert started, Peter Mlakar of the Department of Pure and Applied Philosophy of NSK delivered an explicitly and excessively nationalist speech partly in Serbian. This called on the audience to protect the purity and honour of the Serb people and defend the integrity of Serbian territory by all means. In order to emphasise the content of this speech the Laibach group employed all available means for the staging of a totalitarian aesthetics. All elements that would allow for a distancing or alienation were consciously excluded. The speech itself consisted of a direct appropriation and repetition of an address originally delivered by Serbian president Slobodan Milošević.²² Mlakar's speech pinpointed the Serb nationalist rhetoric, which could already be heard in a Yugoslavia that had started to dissolve. There was, however, a slight danger that this appropriation might be misunderstood: in the worst case, Mlakar's speech would be taken for granted, i.e. it would be understood in a truly affirmative way. In order to avoid this, the group resorted to a provocative move: during the speech that was in itself consistent (it consisted of seamlessly interwoven Milošević quotations), central words and sentences would slip into German — a language that in Yugoslavia was synonymous with fascism. This move prevented any positive or affirmative reading. All in all, this speech proved to be deeply irritating to the audience because on all the other levels it was affirming Serbian nationalist rhetoric.

Another good example of this type of over-identification, i.e. a tactic that allows for a participation in certain political or social discourses, for affirming them, appropriating them, or consuming them while simultaneously undermining them, is the so-called 'poster scandal'. In 1986–7, New Collectivism (NK), the design department of the NSK, unleashed an internationally respected scandal when it submitted a design based on a Nazi poster to the competition for the *Day of Youth*

Novi Kolektivizam / NSK
Dan Mladosti
poster design, 1986/87

Chempiony Mira
Gigijena poberezhija
(*Hygiene on The Shore*)
Odessa, 1987

Zitatenschlacht zwischen zwei konträren Systemen', in *Neues Deutschland*, 13 August 1992

16. S. Žižek, 'Why are Laibach and NSK not Fascists?', in *M'ARS — Časopis Moderne Galerije*, Vol. 3.4 1993, p. 4

17. See B. Groys, 'More Total than Totalitarianism', in *IRWIN: Kapital*, NSK, Ljubljana 1991

18. See A. Barber-Kersovan, 'Laibach und sein postmodernes Gesamtkunstwerk', in H. Rösing (ed.), *Spektakel/Happening/Performance. Rockmusik als Gesamtkunstwerk*, Stiftung Villa Musica, Mainz 1993, pp. 66-80

19. S. Žižek, 'Das Unbehagen in der Liberal-Demokratie', in *Heaven Sent*, n° 5 1992, p. 49

20. S. Žižek, 'Why are Laibach and NSK not Fascists?', in *M'ARS — Časopis Moderne Galerije*, Vol. 3.4 1993, p. 4

21. Witte 2001

22. P. Mlakar 'would end by directly quoting British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, the key architect of European pre-war appeasement of Adolf Hitler.' M. Benson, *Predictions of Fire*, film script, 1995

23. See *The Economist*, London, 14 March 1987, p. 49 and *Profil*, Vienna, 13 April 1987, p. 56, as quoted by P. Ramet, 'Yugoslavia 1987: Stirrings from Below', in *The South Slav Journal*, Vol. 10, n° 3 Autumn 1987, p. 34

24. *Ob'edinenie real'nogo iskusstva*. The Oberiu group existed between the end of 1927 and 1932, and is the

(*Dan Mladosti*) celebrated each year on 25 May, Tito's birthday. NK promptly received first prize awarded by a highly official pan-Yugoslavian committee consisting of representatives from the Association of Slovenia's Socialist Youth, the Yugoslavian People's Army, and the Association of Yugoslavia's Communists. NK's poster consisted of a slightly altered version of the picture *Das dritte Reich. Allegorie des Heldentums* (*The Third Reich. Allegory of Heroism*, 1936) by the German artist Richard Klein. This portrayed a youth marching victoriously into the future equipped with baton, Yugoslavian flag, and other state insignia. The committee praised New Collectivism's poster and justified the award by saying that the design 'expresses the highest ideals of the Yugoslavian state.'²³ Following the exposure of the image's source, it was all the more embarrassing when the Yugoslavian federal officials attempted to press charges against NK for 'disseminating fascist propaganda.' Luckily for the artists, the Slovenian officials were able to prevent this move.

Oberiu: An Almost-Forgotten Source of Subversive Affirmation / Over-Identification

It is interesting to ask whether the artistic practices of subversive affirmation and over-identification only appear in the second half of the twentieth century, or if they can be traced back to earlier forms, or even to their 'origins.' There appear to be largely unknown conceptual links to the absurdist practice of Oberiu of the late 1920s and early 1930s which has been called the last Soviet avant-garde (Oberiu is short for Association of Real Art²⁴ — Daniil Kharms, Alexander Vvedensky and others). Only a few researchers have so far linked contemporary strategies/tactics of subversive affirmation (esp. in Moscow Conceptualism) to Oberiu.²⁵

In the context of totalitarian literature we can designate subversive affirmation as a 'literary strategy of the exterior' in an 'interior' (i.e. totalitarian culture) that presents itself as 'total'.²⁶ Within Oberiu's texts, this 'strategy of the exterior' is realised on the one hand through an articulation of falling silent — as in Kharms's *Blue Notebook n° 10* — which thus points to and articulates the border between permitted speaking and imposed silence. Subversive-affirmative expression 'completes the movement with which the construction of the total becomes a paradox project, thereby rendering it visible.'²⁷ It also makes visible the techniques 'which prevent the exterior from voicing itself.' On the other hand the texts of the late avant-garde copy, simulate and 'embody' the strategies of the interior (of the ruling ideology) and thus focus 'on their articulation.'²⁸ The absurd literary bodies literally embody the ideological reduction that radically deforms their anatomy as well as their ability to articulate themselves. A good example of this is Daniil Kharms text 'The Blue Notebook' (1937) in which he describes a redheaded man who, upon reading further, loses more and more body parts until nothing is left to talk about:

There lived a redheaded man who had no eyes or ears. He didn't have hair either, so he was called a redhead arbitrarily. He couldn't talk because he had no mouth. He had no nose either. He didn't even have arms or legs. He had no stomach, he had no back, he had no spine, and he had no innards at all. He didn't have anything. So we don't even know who we're talking about. It's better that we don't talk about him any more.

Source: www.octopusmagazine.com/issue05/poets/Daniil_Kharms.htm

The writers of the late Soviet avant-garde thus turn themselves into what the ruling ideology expects them to be, without — and this is important — affirming that which they subject themselves to.²⁹ This is what identifies them as predecessors of

subversive-affirmative techniques. At the same time though, one can feel a latently present 'metaphysical fear'³⁰ and an 'aesthetics of panic'³⁴ which still locates them very clearly in the context of totalitarian literature, and not, as some scholars have claimed, in a kind of proto-postmodern attitude.

For Oberiu, repetition of already existing linguistic forms remains the only possible form of utterance. While the futurists focussed on the innovation of the code (thus on making words strange), the Oberiuty intended syntactical estrangements that would destabilise the entire semantic and pragmatic logic (while keeping the word units intact).³² The futurist/formalist principle of 'not-understanding' (brought about by making words strange) is being replaced in the poetics of Oberiu by the dialogical-communicative principle of misunderstanding.³³ They are dealing with an 'empty' language which does not possess any positive notion with which to describe the world. This kind of speaking can articulate itself only through repetition of already existing formulas. This apophatic 'discourse-thinking' which relies on the techniques of talking literally while sticking to the correct syntactic and grammatical forms of utterances,³⁴ simultaneously points to something different through the 'internal alterity' contained within itself. The literary practices of Oberiu correspond to repetition, which, very unlike estrangement, effects a deletion or dissolution of distance. We are confronted here exactly with the disappearance of critical distance practiced with the subversive affirmation and over-identification described in the beginning.

In 1940, shortly before his own arrest, Daniil Kharm's for instance wrote a fake confession of a nameless defendant entitled *Reabilitacija* (*Rehabilitation*) in which he makes use of affirmative practices. Obviously this very minimalist text is connected to the fake confessions and self-accusations of the show trials taking place from the late 1930s. For his own defence, Kharm's criminal chooses the Stalinist idea of inventing crimes. Undoubtedly, the idea of inventing crimes was a reference to the show trials. Kharm's inventions, or rather that of his protagonist, however, were much more fantastic and strange than the accusers ever expected. Thus, the accusers were confronted with the laying bare of their own strategy, which the accused had revealed with his confession. In this sense the confession was a confession about Stalinist techniques of truth production.

Beyond Oberiu we can find comparable tactics: four years earlier, in 1936, the writer Isaac Babel' was in a similar situation to Kharm's protagonist. At the (in)famous conference against formalism in art and literature Babel' had to confess publicly why he had not been publishing anything during the last years. Babel', too, defended himself in a way that seemed absolutely affirmative. However, he did not invent fantastic reasons, he simply said the truth: he claimed that he had not been able to write because of his extraordinary self-criticism. Babel' said that he was such a strong self-censor that he couldn't write anything. The reaction of the public showed that nobody understood his way of speaking. Furthermore, as nobody assumed in his speech a possible tactic of subversive affirmation, the majority of the critical audience condemned Babel' for his posing. They were convinced that he really had given an affirmative answer to the concept of self-criticism.

Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*

Is it possible to transfer these tactics of subversive affirmation and over-identification developed in socialist Eastern Europe to other social and political systems? If so, how would these tactics function, which forms would they adopt? And what exactly would be affirmed? As stated above, we discovered a direct connection between

last formation within the Russian or Soviet literary avant-garde before the abolition of all literary groups in 1932. For further information on Oberiu, see: J.P. Jaccard, *Daniil Harms et la fin de l'avantgarde russe*, Herbert Lang, Bern 1991; N. Cornwell, *Daniil Kharm's and the Poetics of the Absurd*, Macmillan, London 1991. Members of Oberiu were the poets Daniil Kharm's (b.1905 – d.1942), Aleksandr Vvedenskij (b.1904 – d.1941), Nikolaj Olejnikov (b.1898 – d.1937), the more philosophical author Leonid Lipavskij (b.1904 – d.1941) and the music theoretician and philosopher Jakov Druskin (b.1902 – d.1980). As there was no opportunity for the works of Oberiu to be published, the group organised theatrical recitation soirées which became notorious because of their eccentric concept. In 1928 at the Leningrad House of the Press Oberiu presented their first event, *Three Left Hours*, a mixture of poetry reading, propaganda lecture and concert during which Daniil Kharm's *Elizaveta Bam* was premiered. Towards the end of 1931 Oberiu became the target of political repression and severe attacks from the press. In 1932, like all the other literary groups in the Soviet Union, Oberiu was dissolved. In this way, 'the last remaining shreds of post-revolutionary Soviet modernism' (in the words of Samuil Marsak) were shattered again. The Oberiu group members were possibly the first to understand that 'state intervention into literature was increasingly pushing the author out of the text

(Kasper 1995). Kharms and Vvedenskij became active in the field of children's literature, where they could express their 'natural thinking'. Olejnikov, Kharms and Vvedenskij were arrested at the time when Stalin's rule was most oppressive; they died in a forced labour camp. Peter Urban calls Oberiu 'possibly the first genuinely free people of the Soviet time... in spite of the atrocious conditions of their life.' (Urban 1992, p.17)

25. Several authors have pointed to this relationship. See M. Epstejn, 'Iskusstvo avantgarda i religioznoe soznanie,' in *Novyj Mir* 12 1989, pp.222-35; A. Hansen-Löve, 'Zur Typologie des Erhabenen in der russischen Moderne', in *Poetica*, Vol.23 1991, 1-2, pp.166-216

26. S. Sasse, C. Schramm, *op. cit.*, p.307

27. *Ibid.*

28. *Ibid.*, p.313

29. *Ibid.*, p.315

30. J.P. Jaccard, *op. cit.*

31. A. Hansen-Löve, 'Konzepte des Nichts im poetischen Denken der russischen Dichter des Absurden', in *Poetica* 26, 1994, p.317

32. The Slavacist Aage Hansen-Löve talks about 'apophatic' repetitions which he distinguishes sharply from the 'cataphatic' estrangement techniques of the avant-garde models I and II. See A. Hansen-Löve, 'Thesen zur Typologie der Russischen Moderne', in P. V. Zima, J. Strutz (eds.), *Europäische Avantgarde*, Lang, Frankfurt/Main and others 1987, pp.37-59

(if not adoption of) certain (media) activist projects and their subversive-affirmative predecessors. In his famous book *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau provides convincing reasons for the appropriation of tactics developed in a totalitarian setting in an out and out capitalist context.

Subversive affirmation and over-identification are tactics — if we are to follow Michel de Certeau's definition — that allow artists to take part in certain social, ideological, political, or economic discourses, and affirm, appropriate, or consume them while simultaneously undermining them. On the Western art scene, these phenomena appeared here and there among the *Lettrists* and the *Situationist International*.

When looking at affirmative practices in art we are interested in how far, in a situation of limited individual freedom of expression, the use or repetition of already existing forms, i.e. non-individual speaking or utterances, allows for critical, deviating or oppositional statements. Michel de Certeau talks about exactly these possibilities. He confronts the notion of passive consumption with the notion of active *usage* or *practice*. This 'different production' is almost invisible because it articulates itself 'not through its own products, but precisely in the way the products that are imposed by the ruling order are *used* or *practised*.'³⁵ The movements of this 'different production' happen entirely 'inside the enemy's field of vision, in a space entirely controlled by the enemy. That's why de Certeau calls this 'different production tactics' (as opposed to strategies). Tactical practices create blurry vectors that consist entirely of the vocabulary of known languages and are subject to a pre-existing syntax (this could also be their danger, or, rather, difficulty). However, despite their using the same linguistic or social material, tactics manage 'to stay heterogeneous (or alien) to the systems they invade,' and, once inside these systems, they 'wittily manage to deploy and formulate *different* interests and wishes.'³⁶ According to de Certeau, statistical analysis proves quite destitute facing this phenomenon. Statistics are extremely limited because they can only 'classify the lexical units of which the vectors [of tactics] consist, but to which they cannot be reduced.'³⁷ Statistics can only grasp the *material* of tactical practices (which is the same as the one used in strategies). It cannot, however, get hold of their *form*, which is what makes tactical practices alien to the ruling order.

Please Love Austria! by Christoph Schlingensiefel³⁸

In the framework of the Wiener Festwochen in June 2000, Christoph Schlingensiefel organised the container action *Please love Austria! First European Coalition Week*. In this action, Schlingensiefel adapted the mass-media format of *Big Brother* to stage a live media-savvy deportation of asylum seekers from a container located next to Vienna's opera house. Twelve participants — introduced by Schlingensiefel as asylum seekers — were placed in the three containers. For seven days, from 11 to 17 June 2000, they were living in these containers under permanent video camera surveillance. The live images from the container were being streamed onto the Internet where anybody could watch them. Each day, people who called in by telephone could vote for two of the inmates who would have to leave the containers in the evening and who were deported the same night.

By advertising the whole event as an action of the FPÖ (i.e. the right-wing Freedom Party of Austria, in power as part of the ruling coalition since 2000), Schlingensiefel could count on the attention of the mass media. On the roof of the containers the blue flags of the FPÖ were mounted. When a signboard with the text 'Foreigners out of the country' was set up (together with the logo of the yellow press paper *Kronenzeitung*), the public applauded. Across the Herbert-von-Karajan-Square recordings of speeches by the then FPÖ chairman Jörg Haider could be heard.

With this project, Schlingensiefel wanted to 'play the impossible so hard that it would become the possible. There should be an end to speculating, an end to this stupid creation of distance through scepticism. On the contrary: it is impossible to contradict Haider. What is possible is playing the Haider card to its most extreme.' On the website a global audience could see what it means to take seriously the Austrian right-wing FPÖ politician Haider's suggestions concerning the solution of the 'foreigner problem'.

Those in the audience who wanted to participate via the Internet could click on one of the candidates' heads in the lower part of the website. There was a biography for each asylum seeker, and a further click on 'Vote' would increase the chance of that individual becoming one of the two people deported from the country that evening. The person who stayed longest in the container would be the winner and would receive 35,000 Austrian shillings and an airplane ticket to return to their home country. Alternatively the winner would be given the possibility to marry an Austrian via an online-proposal.

The project received a lot of attention. During the whole duration, the public and media asked the same questions again and again: are the inmates real asylum seekers, or simply actors? Is the daily deportation of two of them a fake, or is it indeed an element of European reality? Were the FPÖ banners on the containers authentic? And, a question that many enraged tourists asked themselves: is the event in the square near the opera house part of Austrian reality? Questions and irritations were so far-reaching that the city administration thought about putting up signs saying, 'Attention! This is a theatre performance!' Of course Schlingensiefel did not allow this to happen. But this attempt alone was proof enough that his theatre 'had reached a certain hyper-reality' once again.

Nike Ground by 0100101110101101.org

Only three years later, in September 2003, a news item again shocked the Austrian public: Karlsplatz, one of Vienna's main squares, would soon be renamed 'Nikeplatz'. This news was issued by representatives via the red 'Nike Infobox' information centre — a 13-ton hi-tech container — located in the middle of Karlsplatz, one of Vienna's historic squares. On the outer windows a curious sign attracted the attention of passers-by: 'This square will soon be called Nikeplatz. Come inside to find out more.' Inside the Infobox a charming couple of Nike-dressed twins welcomed curious citizens, and explained to them the revolutionary *Nike Ground* campaign: 'Nike is introducing its legendary brand into squares, streets, parks and boulevards: Nikesquare, Nikestreet, Piazzanike, Plazanike or Nikestrasse will appear in major world capitals in the coming years!' A 3D project displayed in the Infobox gave information about a giant artwork to be placed in the Karlsplatz or Nikeplatz from the following year. It would be a giant sculpture of Nike's famous logo, a monument of 36 by 18 metres, supposedly made from 'special steel covered with a revolutionary red resin made from recycled sneaker soles'.

Needless to say, it was all fake. The one-month campaign provoked reactions from Vienna's citizens (ranging from protest to approval), city officials (reassuring the public that street names cannot be changed so easily) and, of course, the Nike group. Nike denied any involvement and started legal action to put an end to this bizarre performance. The *Nike Ground* prank is the latest work from an organisation known as 0100101110101101.org, whose members state that they are significantly influenced by the work of Laibach / NSK.

33. See A. Hansen-Löve, *op. cit.*, p. 316

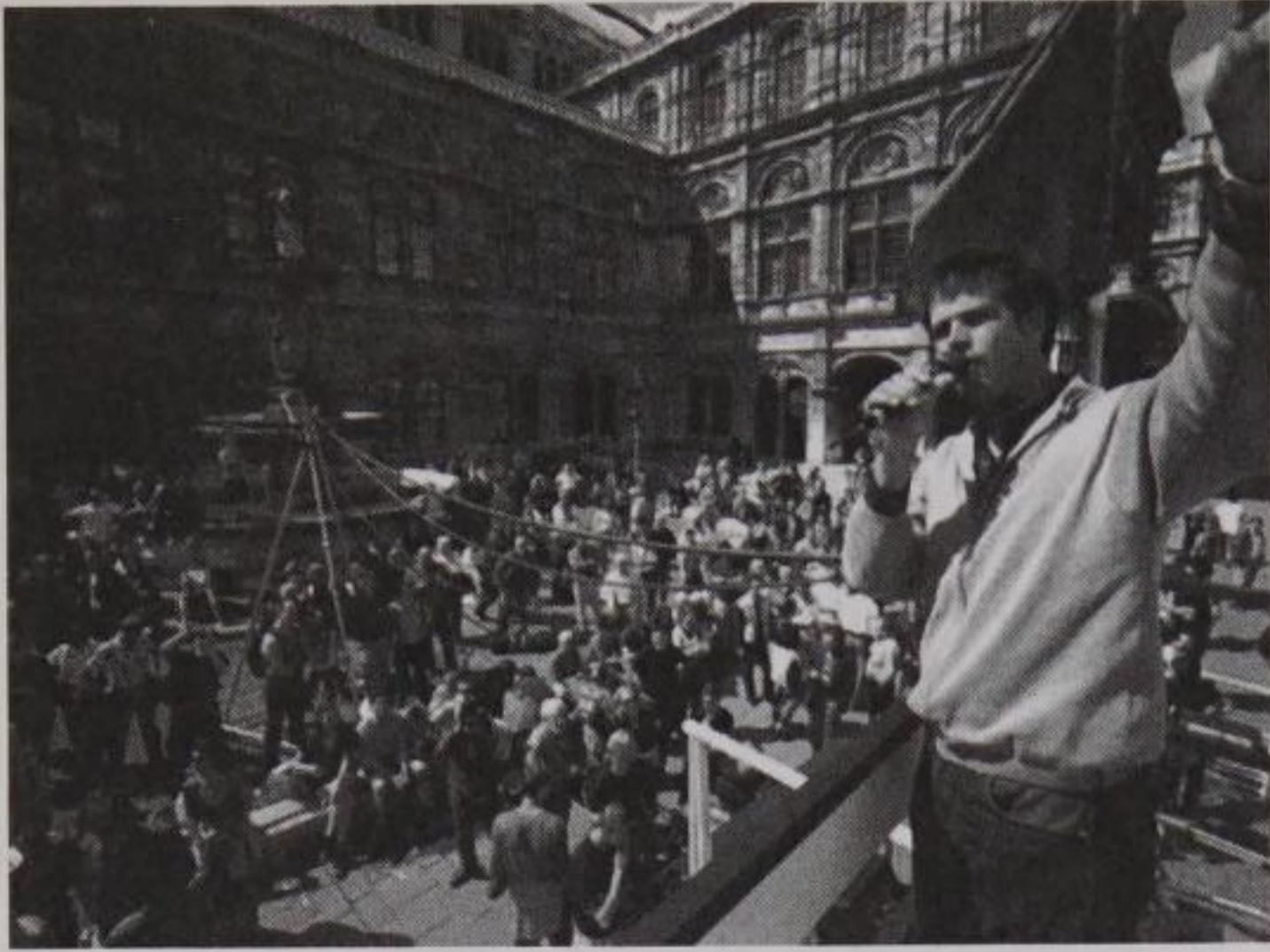
34. *Ibid.*, p. 320

35. M. de Certeau, *Kunst des Handelns*, Merve Verlag, Berlin 1988, p. 13

36. *Ibid.*, p. 85

37. *Ibid.*, p. 22

38. June 2000, Wiener Festwochen, www.schlingensiefel.com/auslaenderraus



Christoph Schlingensief

Bitte liebt Österreich!

(Please Love Austria!)

Wiener Festwochen, 2000,

photo courtesy David Baltzer

0100101110101101.org

Nike Ground, Fake

Nike Infobox

various materials,

611 × 548 × 550 cm

installation in Karlsplatz,

Vienna, 2003, photo courtesy

Public Netbase

The Yes Men by The Yes Men

The Yes Men is a project by a group of culture jammers, artists and activists from the United States called RT Mark ('arty mark,' a wordplay on 'trademark' and 'arty'). The group has repeatedly irritated Internet users with fake websites that look confusingly similar to the official websites of politicians and corporations. Amongst others, gw Bush became the target of such a fake. On the fake website gwBush.com Bush publicly recalled his alleged cocaine experiences. When asked about this during a press conference, Bush said publicly in front of TV cameras 'freedom should have its limits.'

Further parody websites were those of the international trade organisation GATT (Global Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) www.gatt.org and of the World Trade Organisation wto.org (both 2001). Some people and other trade organisations mistook the sites for the real thing and wrote in with questions about all sorts of trade matters. The members of RT Mark (Mike and Andy Bichelbaum, or The Yes Men) decided to play it straight and accept invitations to conferences to speak on behalf of the organisation they opposed — namely, the WTO. As spokespeople for the World Trade Organisation, the Yes Men delivered shocking satires of WTO policy to audiences of so-called 'experts.' At an international trade law conference in September 2000 in Salzburg,³⁹ Andy Bichelbaum (i.e. the WTO) proposed a free-market solution to democracy: auctioning votes to the highest bidder. On the TV programme CNBC Marketwrap Europe,⁴⁰ the WTO announced that *might equalled right*, that a privatised education system would help to replace Abbie Hoffman with Milton Friedman, and that there ought to be a market in human rights abuses. At a textiles conference in Tampere, Finland,⁴¹ the WTO unveiled a 3-foot phallus for administering electric shocks to sweatshop employees. In May 2002, at a university

in Plattsburgh, New York,⁴² the WTO proposed that to solve global hunger, the poor should have to eat hamburgers — and then recycle them up to ten times. And at an accounting conference in Sydney,⁴³ the WTO announced that in light of all its mistakes, it would shut itself down, starting again as an organisation whose goals were not to help corporations, but rather to help the poor and the environment.

This sensational announcement brought worldwide reactions, among them a heated debate in the Canadian parliament. At this point the WTO headquarters in Geneva exposed the alleged WTO representative: 'Although we appreciate the humour of the impostor, we do not want prestigious news agencies such as yours to be tricked.' 'This time it's not about humour,' said Andy Bichelbaum who 'represented' the WTO in Sydney. 'We really want to put an end to the WTO and change its charter, so that the poor would profit, and not suffer from trade politics.'

The most recent action of The Yes Men is called *Bush Can*. This autumn, The Yes Men are campaigning for the President of the United States, to explain Bush's policies more clearly and honestly than the official campaign ever could.

Conclusion

What we are seeing in some of today's most interesting — and we would claim also most powerful — media activist projects is something we have called the 'tactics of explicit consent.' We have linked these 'tactics of explicit consent' to the so-called 3rd Soviet avant-garde, Oberiu. Talking about Oberiu as a potential predecessor of subversive affirmation/over-identification, we were especially interested in the fact that the language of Oberiu denies any kind of — as Jean-Francois Lyotard has formulated it — consolation through 'appropriate form'.⁴⁴ Repetition as apophatic denial of form locates the principle of difference not between notions, or opposites, but discovers or places it inside them. We can thus speak of elements of 'proto-subversive affirmation' that are already present in Oberiu.⁴⁵

Today, in a situation characterised by the immediate and total recuperation and appropriation of critical viewpoints by the dominant political and economic capitalist system, the concept of critical distance proves to be completely ineffective. We are thus confronted with a new totality which excludes any possibility of an 'outside' position or distance. However, it is important to stress that this new totality is different from the totality of totalitarianism, although its effects are similar. In this new totality, which is a totality of the market, consumers are either condemned to remain passive (i.e. to actively fulfill the consumer's role assigned to them by the totality of the market) or to develop practices that consist in creatively handling the products pre-given by the ruling order. Today's consumers' tactics consist entirely of ready-made products which — by way of creative consumers' practices (or tactics if we are to follow de Certeau) — are consequently made to function in an entirely different way.

Taken to a logical conclusion, a genuine tactics of subversive affirmation or over-identification would ultimately refuse to be labelled as 'art', and thus to be recognised as subversion at all. Laibach's refusal to issue any statement as to where they 'really' stand and New Collectivism's poster scandal are possibly the instances that get closest to these ultimate tactics of invisibility. These tactics provide, as we have suggested in this article, possibly the most effective contemporary method of subversion. It is, for sure, also the most risky and potentially dangerous tactic as it can easily be misunderstood. In this constellation, it is the recipient to whom full responsibility is being transferred. At the same time, if well-conceived, these tactics are ultimately the most intensive for the recipient.

39. theyesmen.org/hijinks/salzburg/index.shtml

40. theyesmen.org/hijinks/cnbc/index.shtml

41. theyesmen.org/hijinks/tampere/index.shtml

42. theyesmen.org/hijinks/plattsburgh/index.shtml

43. theyesmen.org/hijinks/sydney/index.shtml

44. J-F Lyotard, 'Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist postmodern?' ed. P. Engelmann (ed.) *Postmoderne und Dekonstruktion. Texte französischer Philosophen der Gegenwart*, Reclam, Stuttgart 1990, pp. 33-48, here: p. 47

45. However, the notion of apophatic as used by Hansen-Löve cannot sufficiently characterise the tactics of subversive affirmation and over-identification. These 'paradoxical' strategies/tactics do not only consist of affirmation, but are precisely characterised by the fact that with affirmation there simultaneously takes place an 'unveiling' of what is being affirmed. In subversive affirmation it is the public formulation of formulas that necessarily remain hidden and the thinking to a logical end of the official postulate — possibly even the violent affirmation — that undermines affirmation. An archeology of subversive affirmation would therefore look for elements of subversive affirmation within Oberiu that does not only affirm the mechanisms of exclusion, but simultaneously

Confidential Community vs. the Aesthetics of Interaction

Viktor Misiano

In my personal destiny, a number of events have woven together in a chain of cause and effect. In May and June 1992, as part of the exhibition *Molteplici Culture: Itinerari dell'arte contemporanea in un mondo che cambia* at the Museo del Folclore in Rome, I presented a small exhibition project entitled *Scientific Investigation*.¹ This project represented my first step towards a new kind of curatorial practice, which eventually came to be called performative curatorship.² In fact, this show turned out to be extremely important in the history of European curatorship in the 1990s, for it brought together for the first time a whole range of curators whose work would later define the development of this new type of project work (Hans Ulrich Obrist, Andrew Renton, Dan Cameron), as well as artists whose work fit this form of curating — artists whom the French critic Nicolas Bourriaud, and others after him, later referred to as 'relational artists' (Liam Gillick, Renée Green, Philippe Parreno, Anatoly Osmolovsky and others).³ Included in their ranks were also the artists from the group IRWIN.

At the same time that I and two IRWIN members (Borut Vogelnik and Dušan Mandič) were setting up our projects in Rome, the other members of the group were in Moscow preparing and carrying out the project *NSK Embassy*, which took place from 20 May to 10 June. This was part of the APT-ART International programme I had helped to initiate.⁴ *NSK Embassy Moscow* is one of the most interesting works created by these artists in the area that Bourriaud has termed 'esthétique relationnelle' (relational aesthetics).⁵

I met Bourriaud in Paris towards the end of 1992. We discussed a number of hypothetical joint projects, which were ultimately never realised, but the discussion itself proved extremely productive: in our conversation we contemplated various possibilities, forms, and resources for performative curatorship.

The next practical step in the development of my personal version of performative curatorship occurred over the course of a few weeks in January 1993 at the Centre pour la Création Contemporaine in the town of Tours, some forty minutes from Paris. This was the exhibition *Trio Acustico*, featuring three Moscow artists, Dmitri Gutov, Yuri Leiderman, and Anatoly Osmolovsky. At this same centre, at the beginning of 1992 (that is, not long before my project in Rome), an exhibition had taken place entitled *Il faut construire l'hacienda*; the catalogue had included a programmatic text by none other than Nicolas Bourriaud, titled 'Qu'est-ce que le réalisme opératif?', and extremely fundamental to his thinking. I translated this text into Russian and published it in the first issue of the journal I had founded, *Khudozhestvennyy zhurnal (Moscow Art Magazine)*, which appeared

1. See *Molteplici culture. Itinerari dell'arte contemporanea in un mondo che cambia* (exh. cat.), Edizione Carte Segrete, Rome 1992, pp.111-21

2. According to Alex Farquharson, a London-based critic and curator, this term was first proposed by Maria Lind; see A. Farquharson, 'Curator and Artist,' *Art Monthly*, n°270, 2003

3. This term, coined by French curator Nicolas Bourriaud, will be discussed below.

in September 1993. While working out the basic concept for the magazine, I had in front of me early issues of *Documents*, the magazine Bourriaud had founded and which I had brought back from Paris.

Over the next few years I had the opportunity to try out my abilities in a whole range of curatorial 'performative projects', including some involving the group IRWIN.⁶ At the very end of the decade, in 1999, I bought Bourriaud's book *Esthétique relationnelle* at the Centre Pompidou bookstore. Not long afterwards, in a double issue of *Moscow Art Magazine* that attempted to sum up the main trends of the 1990s, I published another text by Bourriaud, 'L'art des années 90', taken from the book I had bought in Paris.

What follows is an attempt to compare the European experience of 'performative curatorship' and 'relational aesthetics' with an analogous experience that occurred in Russia during the same period. In doing this, my point of reference will for the most part be, on the one hand, the experience — its events and its reflection — solely as presented in the pages of Bourriaud's book, and, on the other hand, the events I experienced personally and reflections contained in texts I wrote during the same period as the essays in Bourriaud's book were being published.

A symptomatic aspect of the Moscow scene in the 1990s was the transgression of the limits of an artefact-based understanding of artistic production and the return of the interactive, socially oriented gesture.

On 21 September 1990 the group BOLI (Farid Bogdanov and Georgy Litichevsky) invited a group of artists to go with them to the Moscow Zoo: they all walked up to the cages and presented their artworks to the animals. The action was called *An Exhibition for Animals*. In this way, the group BOLI entered into an interaction with the Moscow artists as well as with the animals.

On 18 November 1990, the then quite young Anatoly Osmolovsky, along with other members of the group he had founded, Expropriation of the Territory of Art (the Russian acronym is ETI), opened a two-week festival of French New Wave film in one of Moscow's cultural clubs, the so-called Dom Medika (Medic House). Each day a new film was shown, and each day, to the astonishment of the audience, art actions were interjected into the process of viewing the film; these were actions/commentaries on whichever film was being screened. Thus Osmolovsky entered into an interaction with the masterpieces of French cinema of the 1960s as well as with the public in the auditorium.

At the same time, in April 1991, I began my initial preparations for the project *Scientific Investigation*, which I mentioned earlier. Having been invited to put together a small project that would problematise the phenomenon of the 'Other' in the contemporary world, I went to the artist Yuri Albert and asked him to name his 'Other' and to give me a written explanation of his selection along with one of his characteristic small-format works. Later, I presented the same request to Yuri Albert's 'Other' (the group s/z), and from there on the chain kept growing. In the final count, all the materials I had collected — the works and texts of the various artists — were exhibited in plexiglass boxes. Their arrangement on the wall followed the logic of how the 'experiment' had developed while severe black arrows, transferred onto the wall, indicated the direction of the chain. In other words, instead of making a traditional thematic exhibition, I entered into an interaction with the artists and, through my actions, forced them into an interaction with one another.

4. APT-ART International (or APT-ART INT) was carried out in Moscow from 1990 to 1993; it was initiated by myself and two others, the artist Konstantin Zvezdochetov and the critic Yelena Kurlyandtseva. The concept of the project was to rejuvenate the 'underground era' tradition of apartment-based exhibitions (these had been given the name APT-ART). Now we were inviting foreign artists to put together apartment-based shows in Moscow. For more about IRWIN's participation in APT-ART INT, see the catalogue *NSK Embassy Moscow*, as well as E. Čufer, 'Mind Your Own Business', *Moscow Art Magazine*, n° 22, 1999, pp.39-41

5. See N. Bourriaud, *Esthétique relationnelle*, Les Presses du réel, Paris 1998

6. For more on one of these projects, see E. Čufer, V. Misiano (eds.), *Interpol: The Art Exhibition Which Divided East and West*, IRWIN and Moscow Art Magazine, Ljubljana 2000

The *NSK Embassy* became yet another example of relational aesthetics for Moscow, one that was particularly mature and well articulated. A similar aesthetics was already at work in the very programme behind the revival of APT-ART — that of inviting foreign artists to exhibit in Moscow in private spaces such as the home or studio of an artist. In this, professional representation was intended to dissolve in an environment of human interaction. In the three rooms of the *NSK Embassy*, regular seminars and discussions were held; presentations by the Noordung theatre group, screenings of video materials, and so on. In this way IRWIN did, in fact, instigate the interaction of two cultural situations and laid the foundation for an entire history of subsequent interactions. What is more, in the discussions at the *NSK Embassy* a group of Moscow artists who recognised each other as kindred spirits came together; these artists would later take part in most of the performative projects I organised.

All of these projects — and this list and description could be extended — fully meet the criteria Bourriaud provides for relational aesthetics. They all share an orientation towards ‘transforming the spectator of the work into its direct participant and auditor’; this refers to the attempt to work ‘with the sphere of mutual interpersonal relationships ... to bring into effect various forms of social exchange, processes of communication in their concrete dimension — the mutual conjoining of different individuals and human groups.’⁷ It is precisely this orientation that defines the most advanced art of the 1990s: for this aesthetics, ‘the sphere of social interaction is the same thing that mass production had been previously for pop art and minimalism.’⁸

At this stage we can draw our first conclusion: at the beginning of the 1990s — indeed, for the first time since the end of World War II — the most innovative forms of artistic practice proclaimed themselves simultaneously in both Western Europe (or to put it more broadly, on the international scene) and in Russia and Eastern Europe. This fact in itself justifies our defining the artistic scene of those years as a global one, subject to transverse processes. But the question remains: how did this become possible? Why did these artistic tendencies appear so early in the eastern part of Europe, and in such mature and reflective forms? To what extent was the practice of relational aesthetics rooted in the local problematic of Russia, which itself was what brought this practice to life?

In one of the crucial texts of the collection *Esthétique relationnelle*, the essay ‘L’art des années 90’, Bourriaud proposes a typology for the diverse forms of this artistic practice. Thus, in the category ‘connections et rendez-vous’ (‘connections and appointments’) he includes work that takes the form of a ‘business card, a notebook with addresses, or procedures for opening an exhibition. It is precisely such works that shape the artistic environment and endow it with the dimension of an interaction.’⁹ The next category in Bourriaud’s typology is ‘convivialité et rencontres’ (‘conviviality and encounters’): here he refers to artists who help to establish ‘a café or bar, who organise a holiday or debates on the radio, who “take up residence” for an extended period in an art gallery,’ and so on.¹⁰

In addition to examples from Western European art practice that illustrate the category ‘conviviality and encounters’ in ‘L’art des années 90’, one might add Vadim Fishkin’s *Darkness Orbit*. In the spring of 1993, Fishkin ‘sneaked’ his works into other artists’ exhibitions and displayed them only at night. Each night, from midnight to dawn, he would, with a ring full of keys, take whoever was interested around to all six galleries in the complex of the Centre for Contemporary Art.

7. N. Bourriaud, *op. cit.*, p. 45

8. *Ibid.*, p. 46

9. *Ibid.*, p. 30

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 32-3

11. *Ibid.*, p. 32



In the category ‘connections and appointments’, one might also mention Anatoly Osmolovsky’s publication *mailRadek*. From 1995–9, six hundred people (four hundred in Russia and two hundred foreigners) regularly found envelopes in their mailboxes with a text commenting on the current events of day-to-day artistic life.

On 26 November 1992, Yuri Babich made both an ‘encounter’ and an ‘appointment’ with his work *Wedding*. A large banquet table, festively laid out, was set up in a gallery space; at the head of the table the artist himself sat next to a young woman in a bridal dress, while a marriage certificate, issued for the very same date, hung in a frame on the wall.

From a sociological point of view, all these examples deal with the construction of the autonomy of the artistic life, its internal rituals. In explaining the symptomatic features of relational aesthetics, Bourriaud associates it with a disillusionment in critical philosophy among artists and intellectuals in the 1990s: ‘The subversive and critical function of contemporary art is from now on realised in the invention of lines of individual or collective flight, in temporary and nomadic constructions by means of which the artist models and transmits certain disorderly situations.’¹¹

The Moscow experience can only be partially recognised in this definition. The demise of the ideological order, in fact, stripped art of its former legitimacy and forced it to seek a new identity. For those in the art community, it led to a heightened feeling of internal mutual dependence. Moscow artists, then, would not be able to see themselves in this orientation towards ‘individual or collective flight.’ Whereas Western artists sought to construct an internal autonomy outside of official institutions, in Russia the construction of autonomy was meant to compensate for the ‘flight of the institutions’. Typically, the concept of the institution almost never comes into play in the pages of *Esthétique relationnelle*: institutions are simply too close for Bourriaud to see; they exist for him in a ‘zone of non-distinction’ (as Moscow Conceptualists used to say in the 1970s). One need only skim the pages of *Moscow Art Magazine* from those years to see the obsession with which its writers — critics, theoreticians, and artists — all made use of the term ‘institution.’ They call for something that does not exist, something they consider to be sorely lacking in Russia’s current state of economic and social crisis.

For this reason, in the Russian context relational aesthetics was not so much the limited artistic practice of a group of progressive artists as the collective practice of an entire community, of people who were imitating, through a system of group interactions, an institutional reproduction of artistic life. These collective compensatory efforts led to the formation of a specific type of community, one that I defined — in an article published, as it happens, in the same issue of *Moscow Art*

Vadim Fishkin

Darkness Orbit

1993, time-based exhibition
Shkola Gallery, Gelman
Gallery, Dar Gallery, I.O
Gallery and Contemporary
Art Center, Moscow (the
project took place in the four
galleries and the CAC at the
same time). During the three
weeks the exhibition was on,
it was open during the night
from 12 pm to 6 am. During
the day all exhibition spaces
had their regular exhibitions.

Yuri Babich

Wedding

action, Tryokhprudny
Gallery, Moscow,
26 November 1992

Magazine as the Russian translation of 'L'art des années 90' — as a 'tusovka.' (The word 'tusovka' is Russian slang for an informal circle of people with shared interests (for example, rock music) who get together on a regular basis.) The term was no more or less than the way this community referred to itself; at the time I described it as follows:

Having appeared as a substitute for disintegrating institutions, tusovka is an utterly personalised type of association. Freed from institutions, it replaces them with personalised surrogates. Tusovka does not know museums, but it has man-museums, it does not know real periodicals, but it has a man-journal, it does not have art criticism, but it has a critic, there are no exhibition structures, but there is a curator, no reflexiveness, but there is a philosopher, no state support, but it has its own minister. At that, surrogates have absolutely performative status, lacking any kind of verification of production. A man-journal does not need to confirm his status through regular periodical publishing, it is sufficient for him simply to collect materials in his editorial portfolio; a curator is not obliged to organise exhibitions in order to confirm his status (and he is definitely not obliged to organise good exhibitions), and the only thing required from the minister is to show up at every exhibition opening, holding a glass in his hand. Tusovka does not verify activity, it does not have adequate criteria for that — it only demands meetings. Tusovka is a post-productive and purely simulative community.¹²

While defining relational aesthetics as a post-critical intellectual position, Bourriaud did not, however, strip it of its utopian life-building pathos. Now, however, it is not the Great Utopia of the avant-garde that is at issue, but rather what the Italian artist Maurizio Cattelan (one of Bourriaud's heroes) has called 'dolce utopia'.¹³ The slogan of relational aesthetics is 'apprendre à mieux habiter le monde' ('learn the best way to inhabit the world'); in other words, we are dealing with the totality of separate small utopias, with efforts by small groups to inhabit small spaces discretely and at different times. Lacking the possibility of changing the world, artists can 'inside the already-developed real order of things create other forms of existence and behaviour ... By accepting the conditions he receives from the present as a given, he leaves behind the chance to transform the context of his life (his interrelations with the world as emotionally and cognitively apprehended) into an enduring universe.'¹⁴

Rirkrit Tiravanija is the artist whose work most consistently embodies these ideas. In fact, the article 'L'art des années 90' begins with a description of his action at the Venice Biennale in 1993. In the *Aperto*, the artist set up a tub filled with water that was always boiling thanks to a continuously burning gas heater. Meanwhile, right next to the tub were a number of open boxes of instant Chinese soup. The public was able to cook and eat the soup right there, without leaving the exhibition space. Distributing and eating food with others are primary communal gestures, they appeal to such community-building phenomena as mutual generosity and mutual acceptance. But neither Tiravanija in his work nor Bourriaud in his text makes any attempt to problematise the question: who in fact is paying for this communal meal?

12. V. Misiano, 'Kul'turnye protivorechiya tusovki' (The cultural contradictions of the tusovka), in *Khudozhestvennyy zhurnal*, n°25. 1999, p.40. Several different versions of this article were published; see also 'Cultural Contradictions of Tusovka', in both *Frakcija*, n°14, Zagreb 1999, pp.82-97; *Umělec*, n°7, Prague 1999, pp.34-5; and 'An Analysis of Tusovka: Post-Soviet Art of the 90s', in G. Maraniello (ed.), *Art in Europe, 1990-2000*, Skira, Milan 2002

13. N. Bourriaud, *op.cit.*, p.14

14. *Ibid.*, p.13



It was, however, precisely this question that most concerned Russian artists in the early 1990s. For them, after all, the tusovka was not simply an artistic project; it was a real-life social practice. For that reason, any 'relational project' realised in the context of the tusovka was not only a form of constructing community, it was also an analysis of its social and economic dimensions.

In 1992, the artist Oleg Kulik offered the public a meal of roast suckling pig, but without any silverware laid out on the table. The public hungrily devoured the roast pig using their hands, while at the same time the sponsor observed the action from the sidelines. Unlike Tiravanija's work, this was not about selfless generosity, but rather about how every manifestation of generosity conceals the power motive of the one who provides the food. On 11 April 1992, at the Regina Gallery, as part of Kulik's action *Pig's Snout Makes Presents*, steamed pork was just as altruistically distributed — it was given out to those who had previously been present during the killing of the pig right there in the gallery. As with Tiravanija, this work was about the gift as a ritual form of consolidating community: with Kulik, it concerned a blood ritual of initiation into a community of the elect — a mafia, as it were — since otherwise there could be no community.

On 5 December 1991, Dmitri Gutov created the action *The Small Change of Our Life*. In exchange for monetary bonds, a glass of metal coins was poured into the pockets of spectators. At the time this action occurred, this was the only place in Moscow where paper money was being exchanged for coins: coins had disappeared, since as a result of inflation their value as metal was actually higher than their nominal value as money. Gutov, like Tiravanija, was giving generously to the public, but not because the public, by coming to the exhibition, had been transformed from 'Other' to 'one's own', but because the shared experience of misfortune brings people together.

There is one more category in Bourriaud's typology: 'relations professionnelles: clientèle' ('professional relations: clientele'), which includes works 'that address the already-developed real-life system of social relations, inserting themselves into this system and utilising its social forms.' In other words, Bourriaud is talking about artists who 'include themselves in the actual sphere of production of goods and

Dmitri Gutov
The Small Change of Our Life
 performance,
 Tryokhprudny Gallery,
 Moscow, 5 December 1991

services, resulting in a certain ambivalence between the utilitarian and aesthetic functions of their activity.’¹⁵

The Russian context offered many analogues of similar work. Thus, Alexander Petrelli created the *Overcoat Gallery*, where exhibitions were hung on the lining of his big black Mackintosh, complete with price tags, catalogue texts, and so on. In September 1999, a group of artists, including Avdei Ter-Oganian and the duo Vladimir Dubossarsky and Alexander Vinogradov, created a gallery in a squat on Tryokhprudny Lane, where each Thursday, over a period of two years, they would open a new exhibition in a tiny space measuring six metres by six metres.

During that same period Dubossarsky and Vinogradov began their ‘art to order’ project, where they parodied a team of servile artists willing to make every effort to satisfy any whim on the part of the customer: for a barber they promised to make ‘a picture for a barber’, for Chancellor Kohl they promised ‘a picture for a chancellor’, for France, ‘a picture for France’, and for England, correspondingly, one ‘for England’.

A little while later Avdei Ter-Oganian began working on his most articulated relational project, the *School of Contemporary Art*, the entire educational doctrine of which represented a parody of modernist ideology: students were compelled, in the most literal way, to ‘épater la bourgeoisie’, ‘spit on the older generation’, ‘make art out of nothing’, and so on.

But such was the state of the economy — total institutional collapse combined with neophyte entrepreneurial enthusiasm — that all these projects, even if originally conceived as merely simulative, straightaway took on the nature of reality. Alexander Petrelli, selling his works in the aisles between the stands at fairs, accumulated more red circles than did actual galleries, which at the time, even if founded as actual commercial enterprises, tended in practice to resemble simulative projects. As for the Gallery on Tryokhprudny, it became one of the most successful institutional projects of the 1990s. Dubossarsky and Vinogradov did in fact create a picture for Chancellor Kohl, and their *Picture for France* is now in the collection of the Museum of the Centre Pompidou. Finally, many of the most talented artists of the new generation are, indeed, graduates of the *School of Contemporary Art*.

On the whole, the phenomenon of ‘operational realism’ emerged during the weakening of the disciplinary borders between different spheres of activity, and in the 1990s, as the facts show, this process was global. The extreme ‘realisticness’ of the Russian version of this process, however, is something more than just a symptom of the weakening of ‘disciplinary society’, it is a sign of ‘disciplinary catastrophe.’ The success of the enterprises created by these artists is also testimony to their ability to realise in full measure the creative potential embedded in classic capitalism. The only thing telling us that their ‘honorable’ business remained, nevertheless, a matter of art and not reality can be seen in the fact that their business ventures proved successful. Real-life Russian capitalism, after all, was constructed not on the basis of creativity but on shares of the Soviet inheritance and corruption.

In the summer of 1993, Dmitri Gutov subjected most of the members of the Moscow art community to the Luscher test and also compiled astrological horoscopes for them. He then published his results in a small book entitled *Portraits*.

Somewhat later, on 7 April 1994, at a session of the *Visual Anthropology Workshop*, the artist Yuri Leiderman, having in mind Alexander Brener’s

15. *Ibid.*, p. 36. Bourriaud described a similar tendency in the previously mentioned essay ‘Qu’est-ce que le réalisme opératif?’, published in the first issue of *Khudozhestvennyy zhurnal*, n° 1, Moscow 1993, pp. 18-21

16. See *Masterskaya vizual’noy antropologii. 1993-1994. Dokumentatsiya proyekta/Proyekt dokumentatsii (Visual anthropology workshop. 1993-1994. Documentation of a project/a project of documentation)*, in *Khudozhestvennyy zhurnal*, Moscow 2000, p. 203

performance *Heracles Maker of Skins*, spoke about the fact that relational projects, personally addressed to a referential circle, had become commonplace. He saw in this a manifestation of intellectual limitation and parochialism.¹⁶ This criticism was aimed not so much at specific artists as at the tusovka itself as a community of the self-referential and personalised. An alternative to this community was realised in several performative projects. Of these, the ones most consistent with the principles of this aesthetic were the *Visual Anthropology Workshop* itself and the *Hamburg Project*.

Both projects took place in the period 1993–4 at the Centre for Contemporary Art. The *Visual Anthropology Workshop* lasted a year, from June 1993 to May 1994. The participants were Valery Podoroga, Russia's leading philosopher, and the artists Vladimir Arkhipov, Alexander Brener, Vadim Fishkin, Dmitri Gutov, Nina Kotel, Vladimir Kuprianov, Yuri Leiderman, Anatoly Osmolovsky, Guia Rigvava and others.¹⁷ The essence of the project was a self-evolving discussion between the philosopher Podoroga and the artists: the philosopher proposed a series of interlocking themes, on the basis of which the artists created projects that themselves later became objects for discussion. Meanwhile, the so-called *Hamburg Project* carried out at the same time and through the efforts of almost the same artists, had the character of a 'work in progress'. Here the rule was that each new work had to be created by the artist as a comment on the work of another artist; this work would then provoke the emergence of subsequent referential works by yet other artists.¹⁸

The phenomenon of the small, self-enclosed community arising out of similar practice I have defined as a 'confidential community'¹⁹ (which is very close to what Borut Vogelnik, a member of IRWIN, has called 'groupation'). Indeed, this is the practice closest to the ethical side of the programme of relational aesthetics, with its orientation on 'transforming the context of one's life into an enduring universe'. By internalising the principles of the tusovka 'as a given', the members of the 'confidential community' were trying to subject these principles to thoughtful reflection and to occupy an intellectual and ethical meta-position in relation to the tusovka. The passages Bourriaud wrote with reference to Lévinas, about the human face as a metaphor of responsibility towards the Other,²⁰ seem to comment directly on the practice of the 'confidential community,' whose members could sit for hours facing each other searching for meanings inaccessible to the bustling tusovka.

The difference between the experience of 'confidential communities' and the experience that Bourriaud describes is that, if relational aesthetics saved itself from the world of official institutions through 'flight' into the micro-utopias of interaction, then the utopia of the 'confidential community' occupied a meta-position in relation to the tusovka, which was in itself already a community living according to the laws of artistic interaction. Hence, the practice of these performative projects made use of the procedures of relational aesthetics for the purpose of self-constitution while at the same time subjecting them to critical deconstruction.

One form of distancing was a programmatic and deliberate introversion, even as the tusovka and relational aesthetics, in most of their manifestations, were marked by an extroverted character. Any visitor to the Aperto could sample Tiravanija's soup, just as anyone visiting the exhibition *Unite* could sit at the bar created by Heimo Zobernig. But while confidential communities were not closed sects, it was, nonetheless, only a select circle that were able to get involved with the work of these confidential projects. When the *Hamburg Project* was exhibited, it was the artists' decision that their work be supplied without labels: so focused were they on their own internal interactions that they saw no need to designate the artwork's authorship.

17. All the sessions were documented on video and the discussions were transcribed and published in 2000 as *Masterskaya vizual'noy antropologii* (*Visual anthropology workshop*), see footnote n°16. The video documentation was edited by Alexander Alexeev and Tatiana Dober, and a CD-ROM version was produced in 2004. In addition, excerpts from the workshop materials were published in *Fresh Cream: Contemporary Art in Culture*, Phaidon Press, London 2000, pp. 38–41

18. On the *Hamburg Project*, see Viktor Misiano, 'Das Hamburg-Projekt: Abschied von der disziplinären Ordnung', in P. Choroschilow et al. (eds.), *Berlin-Moskau/Moskau-Berlin, 1950-2000*, Nicolai Verlag, Berlin 2003, pp. 155–8. Another version of this article, in English, is 'The Hamburg Project: A Farewell to Discipline', *Manifesta Journal*, n° 5, 2005

19. See my articles, 'The Institutionalization of Friendship', in E. Čufer (ed.), *Transnacionala: Highway Collisions between East and West at the Crossroads of Art*, Študentska založba, Ljubljana 1999, pp. 182–92, and 'L'amitié comme engagement. Europe de l'Est: Projets confidentiels', in *L'engagement: Actes du symposium de l'Association internationale des critiques d'art*, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, Rennes 2003, pp. 81–93

20. N. Bourriaud, *op. cit.*, p. 23



*The Visual Anthropology
Workshop*
Center for Contemporary
Art, Moscow, 1993–4

From this we can deduce that ‘confidential projects’ were indifferent even to external impressions produced by the progress of their work or its results. Thus one of the questions, raised more than once by Dmitri Gutov during the sessions of the *Visual Anthropology Workshop* was, ‘How does one make a bad exhibition?’²¹ The issue here, of course, is not about a disregard for professional finesse — this would entirely benefit relational aesthetics — but rather about being in any way open to external consumption. As for the tusovka, the more it felt itself to be socially wounded, the more it wished to please, to become part of the fashion, to acquire a status of privilege. Similarly, the projects mentioned in the pages of *Esthétique relationnelle*, through their unforced artistry and effective provocation, clearly counted on winning external sympathy.

What is most characteristic about the ‘confidential community’s’ pretensions to the status of meta-position is the way it strives to investigate the substantial limits of relational aesthetics. While being entirely absorbed in the process of interaction, the artists were constantly testing whether the process itself could be stabilised. They would extend the length of the process to a year, as was the case with the *Visual Anthropology Workshop*, or they would postulate *a priori* its lack of finality, as with the *Hamburg Project*, which was abruptly brought to an end solely because of technical issues. The artists were constantly breaking rules that they themselves had established for their work. Yuri Leiderman, for example, at one of the workshop sessions refused to present a project; instead, he shared a dream he had had. The philosopher, too, did something similar: one of the assignments he proposed for the artists was in the form of a performance. Anatoly Osmolovsky finally demarcated the limits of any possibility of interaction. In his contribution to the workshop he offered the declaration that he was prepared ‘to fight until blood is drawn’ with anyone who pronounces even a single verbal utterance. Interaction had been transmuted from the verbal to the corporal.

Finally, and this is most fundamental, the pretensions of the ‘confidential projects’ to the status of meta-position were legitimised by the fact that the practice itself could also be located at the heart of the unending discussions. In the course of the discussions, the topic would come up as to just how significant — how relevant — was our creative experience. The problem was solved with the following statement by Valery Podoroga:

We do however have one advantage, and that is the advantage of being in a time that is ours. This is the only advantage that we have. The risk is that someone might tell you that your entire life and all your searching amount to nothing but failure. Well? Who can say that? Today nobody can say that, because we are alive, and we are trying to do something... I too work, and I too know what has already been done and thought. But what if I haven't thought about it yet for myself! America has been reading and writing dissertations on Bataille for 30 years, but I am only now planning to write something on him. What am I to do — not write or think about Bataille? Or de Sade, just because there is already an entire tradition of thinking about him, is he closed to me? It is ridiculous to talk like this. I am in my own time, in my own spot, and in that time I speak, reason and think. I am a living thinking, writing, drawing being. I live, and I do. We move and live. It seems to me this is where freedom is.²²

The new decade was inaugurated by the appearance in Russian art of the group What Is to Be Done? (Chto delat?). Lenin's legendary slogan has become a banner for these young artists, writers, and philosophers, while their interaction presupposes the creation of both individual and collective works, including a regularly published newspaper with the same name. Through their work on this newspaper the group interacts with a broad and ever expanding trans-national circle. The era of both relational aesthetics and the tusovka with its 'cultural contradictions' is over. Critical theory, the decline of which Bourriaud wrote about in his book, turns out to be relevant once more. The times demand not *dolce utopia* but actual constructive practice, not meta-position but position, and not interaction but action.

21. *Masterskaya vizual'noy antropologii*, op. cit., pp. 130-3

22. *Fresh Cream*, op. cit., p. 41

Constructing History with the Museum: A Proposal for an East Art Museum Michael Fehr

1. General Considerations

Museumification / Museum

The central achievement of museumification is establishing and securing perception as aesthetic perception. For all things that are not originally conceived as objects intended for perception — for example, artworks — this entails that they be seen as ‘things in themselves’, that is, without any immediate reference to everyday living. It also requires that they be kept in this state. For it is only under this condition that it becomes possible to make the thing an object of multi-dimensional reflection that surpasses all practical references to everyday life. Hence the goal of museumification is to make objects available for contemplation, transform them into ‘semiophores’,¹ objects that signify something, that store a specific form of knowledge.

As a particular form of perception, museumification does not necessarily require a special building. It can be achieved merely by way of a framing within an everyday situation that allows what is framed to be seen divorced from its context and, in certain cases, to be physically removed from it.² In this sense, a museum should be understood as a ‘fixed frame’, a housing (*Gehäuse*) or enclosure in which things are not only shown as objects worthy of contemplation, but also collected. As the collections of a museum grow, so a museum comes to be defined by its holdings, in the sense of a series of inner frames.

As a container, a housing, a clearly defined frame that separates inside and outside and produces a space for perception, the museum is a special place. The museum fundamentally differs from other sites in that all things collected in it come from other sites, other social or natural contexts, and as a rule have usually lost their original function due to this translocation.

The art museum is a special case among museums, because the objects it contains are collected and shown and were conceived primarily as objects for contemplation. Therefore, in contrast to all other kinds of objects, they do not rely on the museum as a site of aesthetic perception. The art museum, unlike all other museums, does not primarily have the function of establishing the character of the objects collected within it as objects worthy of contemplation. And precisely because the objects collected within it already possess this characteristic, it is able to reveal the special quality of aesthetic perception and make the visitor aware of the status of the site.

1. See K. Pomian, *Der Ursprung des Museums, Vom Sammeln*, Klaus Wagenbach, Berlin 1988

2. As art practice often shows, sometimes defunctionalising an object or placing a sign on a dysfunctional object is sufficient for such a framing and for triggering a ‘museumified’ mode of contemplation.

The Museum: Container and Collection

Collecting that is rooted in an aesthetic interest means categorising the objects of the world according to certain aspects, and gathering and preserving these objects in one place as things to contemplate. If the criteria of distinction according to which the objects are found and selected are legible from their contextualisation, this results in a collection. Thus, collections always have a structurally self-explanatory character.

On the one hand, objects can be defunctionalised on the mere basis of their translocation, or alternatively by being grouped to form a coherent whole within the context of a collection. Both result in aestheticisation, which in turn is the prerequisite for objects being perceived as worthy of contemplation. In so doing, the form of aestheticisation determines and structures the form of their perception: if, for example, objects are collected on the basis of a certain common historical factor, they are seen primarily as historical objects, and are placed in a historical museum. If they are isolated from their original context under technological aspects, a technology collection emerges: if the criterion is an artistic one, an art collection can be the result.

As contextualisations of objects that possess their own *raison d'être*, collections form a critical mass, and at the same time provide both an image of reality from which the objects come and the worldview of those who collect these objects. Thus, collections are not only the foundation for constructing views of the world, but also serve as the basis for their critique. But when it comes to developing the collection criteria in both a formal and thematic sense, fine arts are constructive to the extent that they reflect a variety of forms of perception and the diverse perceptions that can be obtained from this. Thus art collections rightly enjoy a higher status than collections of everyday objects.

Collecting Art

The modern or contemporary art museum is characterised by its special place on the border between the categories of rubbish and the durable.³ As a museum, it is by definition an institution located in the category of the durable, and might, due to its older holdings, stretch far back into the region of the unquestionably durable. As an institution concerned with contemporary art production, it also holds objects whose long-term value as objects is not yet secured. The work of curators employed in this kind of museum is accordingly difficult and riddled with contradictions: they not only have the task of preserving and presenting the collections of the museum in such a way that their special aspects become clear to a general audience; they also have to supplement these collections with contemporary artworks, that is, decide what objects from the category of rubbish can be transferred to the category of the durable. The curator of a museum for contemporary art is thus directly confronted with the problem of value, and must ensure that his or her decisions for certain works of contemporary art do not question the role of the museum as an institution of the durable. There are four strategies that can be distinguished for solving this problem; these usually appear in various combinations, and with different emphases.

The first strategy is to wait until the value of individual artworks has stabilised and then bring them into the collection. This presumes being able to work over a long time frame and having access to very substantial financial resources. The risk of this strategy is being unable to obtain certain works because other collectors have already acquired them.

A second strategy relies on specialising in a specific area of collecting. Its successful realisation presumes on the one hand an appropriate level of

3. See M. Thompson, *Rubbish Theory, The Creation and Destruction of Value*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1979

4. See K. Marx and F. Engels, *Das Kapital*, Vol. I, collected works, Vol. XXIII, Berlin 1968, pp. 741-91

5. The Indiana Jones films show (and satirise) how this can be linked to not so noble motivations.

6. A classic example of this is the collection of Albert C. Barnes.

7. An example of a museum collection built with this motivation is Museum Folkwang, which Karl Ernst Osthaus founded in 1902.

8. At issue here is the story of the artist as an unappreciated outsider, who, after initially being rejected by his contemporaries, is discovered and promoted by an unconventional collector, coming to fame late in life, or even posthumously revolutionising art history, and making his backers rich. See O. Kris and O. Kurz, *Die Legende vom Künstler. Ein geschichtlicher Versuch*, Surhkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1995. On the history of the Museum Folkwang in this context, see M. Fehr, 'A Museum and Its Memory: The Art of Recovering History', in S. A. Crane (ed.), *Museums and Memory*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2000, pp. 35-59

9. The website of the Museum of Modern Art on the history of the museum: 'In the late 1920s, three progressive and influential patrons of the arts, Miss Lillie P. Bliss, Mrs. Cornelius J. Sullivan, and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., perceived a need to challenge the conservative policies of traditional museums and to establish

connoisseurship, and on the other the sufficient means to build up at least a critical mass of such objects, allowing the respective judgements to take on clear outlines and become stabilised. Here, one risks operating in a field that ultimately has no chance of growth or proves obsolete in light of overall general developments. The third, perhaps most widespread strategy is to refuse to make judgements of one's own and instead rely on those of third parties, for example, the art market. The risk here is of becoming a victim of the cartels of interpretation and valuation, thus buying only what everyone else buys and creating an environment of uniformity.

The fourth strategy relies on contrast in the power of museumification: it expands the museum frame to include works whose value is not yet secure, creating, for example, a new division where such works can be presented and do not have to be perceived in competition with the works with a secured place of value. The risk of this strategy is the possible lowering of standards of value: the artworks in question might not achieve the status of the durable, thus calling into question the significance of the museum itself.

All of these strategies operate with two kinds of security: on the one hand, the museum archive functions as a more or less hidden rubbish category within the institution of the durable, to which those works that prove non-durable can be banished. On the other hand, academic art history provides an external matrix that makes available the standards for appraising artworks. While recourse to this matrix offers some security, this is only achieved at a high price: for its abstract categories refer solely to the things on display. This disregards the concrete considerations to which every museum as a housing or container is subject. As a consequence, the collections are perceived as more or less meaningful exhibits for the particular canon developed in art history that is being mediated.

A fifth strategy, recently adopted by many museums, is the acquisition of entire collections of private provenance. The problem of evaluation is avoided through private transaction. In my view, such groups of works are bought at an unacceptable risk: i.e. the potential colonisation of museums by private interests.

Unlike the private collector, who without question can do whatever he or she wishes, the public museum must be open in the question of judgement. In this context, the following demands are to be made with regard to collecting at a museum of modern and contemporary art: the criteria for building up and extending a collection must be based on questions that go beyond the limits of art history, and be rooted in the concrete conditions that determine the construction of the museum itself. In other words, a museum should develop its own set of questions, or, as the fashionable phrase goes, its own 'mission statement', and be able to clearly define it. For the appraisal of (contemporary) artworks, the questions raised by the works themselves are particularly relevant. Artworks are understood as answers to these questions, and analysed in terms of their complexity. In a second step, the attempt should be made to determine the extent to which artworks can contribute to the development and differentiation a museum programme. In so doing, the question of whether the museum and the artwork can exist conceptually independent of one another is a decisive factor.

The inclusion of an artwork in the museum should be understood as an act of integration: the museum can and should undergo a certain change as a result of that inclusion. The artwork retains its autonomy, but should also be viewed in relation to the works already present in the collection. The decision to acquire an artwork should be made with the existing collection in mind. This does not necessarily exclude the possibility that the museum can be open to collecting from new areas,

which can be developed by reorganising the display of artworks or shifting the emphases of the collection. The precondition for this is free access to the collections within the museum.

The aim of the curator should be to reveal, at least in the display of a collection, a certain approach to the objects. The curator is there to serve the museum's collections. He or she should not hide behind so-called situational constraints, but present him or herself as an individual responsible for certain decisions. Only in this way can it be made clear that the museum is a contingent construction: a site of aesthetic perception where the processes of selection and judgement can be experienced.

II. Constructions

Founding Museums

Building up collections and founding museums is always a process of original accumulation,⁴ even if it is not based, as is the case for almost all great museums of cultural history, on more or less open forms of theft or expropriation, but academic interest,⁵ amateur taste,⁶ or cultural and political engagement.⁷ In this way, almost all museum collections can be traced back to the initiative and special efforts of individuals who, if not with violence then with significant financial means, were able to build them up. This often occurred in spite of great resistance, and furthermore, such individuals succeeded in materially ensuring the long-term maintenance of their collections by founding a museum or giving their collections to an existing institution, thus making their collections accessible to a general audience. In terms of the conception and development of museums in relation to the art production of a respective period, the Museum Folkwang (founded in 1902 in Hagen as the very first museum for contemporary art), and the Museum of Modern Art (founded in 1929 in New York and claiming to be the first museum of modern art) are equally influential. Although the two museums differ vastly from one another, both were born of a similar pedagogical impulse. Necessary for the creation of both museums was the unusual vision of their founders coupled with great courage or unlimited financial resources. The history of the Museum Folkwang in Hagen, or that of its founder, benefactor and director, Karl Ernst Osthaus, seems similar to the typical artist legend of the nineteenth century,⁸ while the history of MOMA embodies more of the twentieth-century myth of successful entrepreneurship.⁹

Both museums achieved their significance because they were able, in a relatively brief period, to build up an exemplary art historical canon that was more or less binding for subsequent collections and museums. In addition, they did not limit themselves to collecting art, but instead engaged with the applied arts and other areas, including architecture. In Museum Folkwang, Osthaus was able for the first time to trace the outlines of what is today considered early classical modernism: he collected the major works of the French impressionists and German expressionists, along with works by Cézanne, Van Gogh, Gauguin, Matisse and the Fauvists; all the same, he remained clearly tied to the nineteenth-century concept of art. In contrast, the MOMA collection begins in 1880: its claim to pre-eminence is especially rooted in its holdings of classical modernism from the first half of the twentieth century.

As Kirk Varnedoe — Chief Curator of Painting and Sculpture at MOMA from 1988 to 2001 — suggests, MOMA's founder Alfred H. Barr, Jr., in contrast to Osthaus, who died young, was able to develop a clearly defined notion of what modern art is

an institution devoted exclusively to modern art. When The Museum of Modern Art was founded in 1929, its founding Director, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., intended the Museum to be dedicated to helping people understand and enjoy the visual arts of our time, and that it might provide New York with "the greatest museum of modern art in the world".' (www.moma.org/about_moma/history/index.html). See also K. Varnedoe, 'Eine neue Art von Museum', in *Die großen Sammlungen I*, Museum of Modern Art/ Bundeskunsthalle Bonn, New York and Bonn 1992, p.15, where the author describes how the museum found 'the right man at the right time'.

10. *Ibid.*, p.17

11. *Ibid.*

12. This development is reflected by the New Museum of Contemporary Art, a museum founded by former employees of the MoMA with the old goals in mind, and which intended to sell its collections every ten years. 'Founded in 1977, the New Museum of Contemporary Art is the premier contemporary art museum in New York City and among the most important internationally. The Museum is guided by the conviction that contemporary art is a vital social force that extends beyond the art world and into the broader culture: "Our purpose is to engage diverse audiences ranging from arts professionals to those less familiar with contemporary art".' www.newmuseum.org/info_about.php

13. K. Varnedoe, *op. cit.*, p.18; interestingly, both

museums originally excluded the work of Marcel Duchamp. He only came into the MoMA collection at a later date.

14. In developing MoMA, it was, to put it euphemistically, the particular devastation and upheavals of World War II that gave the museum unheard of possibilities for acquiring the main works of early modernism. In other words, it was the specific form of original accumulation that only became possible through the flight and death of countless people in the context of the Holocaust and the war itself.

15. IRWIN, concept for *East Art Map*, in *East Art Map/New Moment* magazine, n° 20, 2002

16. Quote from the concept of the show (2005). It continues: 'The exhibition *East Art Museum* will consist of three parts: *Part I* is a selection of about 50 works by different artists from different countries chosen from the catalogue *East Art Map* as published by IRWIN and *New Moment* magazine in 2003. This selection was made by IRWIN in January 2005, according to the following criteria: works should date from the period 1945-89, be representative of the works chosen for *East Art Map*, and be accessible for a (possibly travelling) exhibition. *Part I* will present these works in the best possible way with a representative exhibition. *Part II* consists of 1:10 scale reproductions of arrangements showing all 250 works included in *East Art Map*; possible arrangements can be based on chronology, theme or

and how a collection of modern and contemporary art should be established.¹⁰ In the early 1930s, Barr used the metaphor of a 'torpedo' to describe the permanent collection, a torpedo moving through time. Its 'tip', Barr said, is the eternally progressing present, while its tail is the past.¹¹ Accordingly, not only was a constant renewal of the MOMA collections planned, but also their regular shift along a temporal axis, so that the museum would focus at any one time on a period of only fifty years. The concept was discarded after bitter controversies over the systematic sales of works that would be required to achieve this, and was quietly abandoned in the early 1950s.¹² In structural terms MOMA thus became a standard museum.

It is true of both the Museum Folkwang and the Museum of Modern Art that in their first decades they focused on a time frame (the years 1840 to 1940) that is clearly recognisable as a period closed to artistic transformation. According to Varnedoe, modern art was now no longer seen as a continuous, ever intense process of 'seceding' from past cultural counter movements, and was instead given its own sense of tradition. In this view, there was a definable era of revolutionary transformation, followed by the historical development, extension and establishment of modernism.¹³ This closed period of development was the pre-requisite that allowed both museums to found an art historical canon.¹⁴ A similarly convincing construction of artistic development and/or art history was no longer possible after World War II, and MOMA, like many other museums of contemporary art, has attempted to face this problem by expanding its acquisitions of contemporary art. The numerous new art museums founded in recent decades can also be understood as a reaction to this development.

East Art Map — East Art Museum

Even if the development of art after World War II cannot be represented in a diagram as clear and simple as the one Barr developed for classical modernism, it remains necessary to be able to define a system of connections to order contemporary artistic work. For contemporary art production refers in many ways to the art history of the past two centuries and builds upon its 'achievements'. At the same time, the products, forms of distribution, and economic importance of the media presents artistic work with many forms of competition. Artists not only need to reflect on this competition; it also forces us to reconsider the function of artistic images in the visual world.

Additional issues that determined art production in those countries where the practice of artistic professions was limited for political reasons or controlled by the state, compound these factors, along with the omnipresent economic problems. Hence, one can in fact speak of an 'East Art', to the extent that 'in Eastern Europe (also known as the former communist bloc, Eastern & Central Europe, or New Europe) there are, as a rule, no transparent structures in which those events, artefacts and artists that are significant to the history of art can be organised into a referential system accepted and respected outside the borders of a particular country. Instead, we encounter systems that are closed within national borders, most often based on arguments adapted to local needs, sometimes even doubled so that besides the official art histories there are a whole series of stories and legends about art and artists opposed to this official art world. But written records about the latter are few and fragmented, and comparisons with contemporary Western art and artists are extremely rare.'¹⁵ It should be pointed out that the phenomenon of an 'Eastern European art' is not only limited geographically to the twenty-one former communist countries, but is also limited in a temporal sense to the years between 1945 and 1990. In addition to this, many artists that come from the countries behind the 'Iron

Curtain' had already left their home countries in the 1950s or 1960s, making their careers as émigré artists in the Western art world. This presents the problem of whether or not they should be included in the *East Art Map*, especially when these artists are now returning to their countries of origin. But the same is true, if with an entirely different emphasis, for those artists who, for whatever reason, cooperated with their countries' regimes or were tolerated because of their prominence. Should they be included or excluded from the *East Art Map*? Who makes this decision; who can take the responsibility for such a decision?

In the many exhibitions made over the past decades on Eastern European art, these questions have usually been pragmatically avoided, or detoured by declaring that the exhibition is only temporary, and that in another exhibition the list of artists would be different. To counter this, our suggestion in making *East Art Map* the foundation for an East Art Museum is the attempt to take the offensive on this question. When considering the establishment of a museum, the question is immediately raised of how the collections should be built up, of how such decisions should be made, and who should make them. This is also true of the suggestion to sketch the East Art Museum in the form of a temporary exhibition.

'The basic idea of the exhibition *East Art Museum* is to present a proposal for the establishment of a Museum of Modern East European Art (EAM) to collect the seminal works of art from Eastern Europe from the period after World War II and in the long run develop an institution of relevance and reputation comparable to the position achieved by the Museum of Modern Art for Western Art. But in setting ourselves this task, the *East Art Museum* project is by no means a naïve attempt to reach an insurmountable goal, but rather a complex work of concept art that reflects the conditions of creating and establishing an art-historical canon as well as its institutional housing.'¹⁶

The East Art Museum is to be understood as a reflection on the concept of art history as embodied by MOMA. In this, art is seen as a permanent process of innovation driven by individual developments, and the related claim of comprehensiveness, to covering all of modern art history. The critical engagement with the East European MOMA will take place by way of its radical affirmation in an attempt to copy the successful concept for use with East Art. The necessary failure of this attempt will reveal that MOMA does not present a universal model for understanding modern art, but that its success is due to a specific historical situation, in terms of both its holdings as well as the founding of the museum. Furthermore, by playing with the canon of Western forms of art history and the implicit taxonomies that govern it, we can find out whether or not an East Art Museum must find a form of its own if it is to equal Western museums such as MOMA.

Translated from German by Brian Currid

subject matter, state or origin, art movement, or a combination of such taxonomies. These arrangements will be commented on by further arrangements of 1:10 reproductions drawn from other exhibitions/collections representing East European Art, such as 2000+, Ljubljana; *After the Wall*, Stockholm; *L'autre moitié de l'Europe*, Paris; *Aspects and Positions*, Vienna; *Osteuropäische Kunst*, Bochum; as well as a documentation of 'official' art shows in the different countries, displayed in a similar form. In principle, this part of the exhibition will be open to additional contributions, as long as they are validated according to art-historical standards, and match the criteria named above. Part II will also include a "reading room" displaying relevant documentary material as well as a "mapping room", within which all schemes depicting the historical development of East European Art are on display. Part III will be dedicated to the question of how to fund and construct an East Art Museum. It will display space allocation plans as well as architectural models, financial and organisational planning, considerations on possible locations, on staffing, and funding, and will include promotional material such as logos, flyers, and prospects. While Part I of the exhibition will be conceived like an ordinary art show, Part II and III will have the character of a studio or research room, a flexible working space that is open to the comments of the visitors to the show.'

A Corruption of the 'Grand Narrative' of Art

Ana Peraica

My first reason for writing on the persistence of anonymity in the case of Croatian art, aside from 'writer's revolt', i.e. wanting to challenge the limitations of the given framework (10 names) and the inflexibility of the bureaucracy of names that is common with such overviews, was to profile a side-narrative. The idea was to resist interpretation.

I was really happy to see how my line of anonymity intruded and grew in the *East Art Map*, connecting distant national (in the case of non-existent stories) narratives synchronically, showing them as an illegal history, a sub-story, especially as, when connected, they proved what Gérard Genette told us is rare in the visual arts (meaning Western visual arts).¹ But in the last three years I have also heard of negative criticism (though I haven't read it) of anonymous writing. In most cases these comments referred to the particular use of publicity, avoiding 'significant' artists who were meant to promote 'exemplary' artworks in Croatian history.² These reactions revealed another part of the story of art narrative in Eastern Europe, frustrated by the dominant one, which had excluded East European art history in the first place.

The Dependence on Stories

My attitude, based on my own experience of Eastern Europe, is that history can never be objective, only demagogic — especially when calling upon historical truth and objectivity. This radical experience for most writers in Eastern Europe, faced with radical turns and revisions of the main (political) story, forces us to analyse not the content of history as such, but the ways it is produced by writing about it. So, rather than in writing a history myself, I am interested in the relationship between East European and Western art history that pre-exists this project. As already suggested, a narrative of East European art history shows desperate signs of not wanting to be established. I will elaborate on this in terms of the production of the narrative, not only in Eastern Europe, but also with regard to the West.

In this introduction I intend to show how East European art history was first expropriated by Western discourse (as in the example of modernism), denied in nature as art at all (the postmodern refusal of social realism), to be, just recently, spectacularly re-invented by the West. In parallel, East European art history has consequently shown shame (in the example of modernism), self-denial (in the case of social realism, which was not re-evaluated until Boris Groys's *Dream Factory Communism* exhibition), and an attempt to fit into the master narrative, as if paying for the sin of politicising art. Meanwhile, Western art has passed through a politicisation (in political, activist art) similar to that of social realism; this, in contrast, was never criticised. Why? Simply, because there is no dialogue between the

1. See G. Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1997 (chapter on 'Onimity, Anonymity and Pseudonymity')

2. The only criticism I found was addressed not to the text but to me, saying that I was 'less objective and professional than one of my colleagues'. See Ivica Župan, 'Temelji klasične povijesti Istoka', in *Novi List*, 16 February 2003

two histories, there is only an indication of the interpretative colonisation and the consequent drama of the colonised. In the scenario in which Western art history is the obvious author, and its institutions an implied reader, the writing of art history in Eastern Europe seems to have no purpose.

But the scenario of invention has happened twice during the twentieth century. Since the West re-invented East European modernism after World War II, it has now totally reinvented East European art.³

The (Un)Cultural Spectacle of the 1990s

It is indeed amazing that East European art history was only recently accepted at all by the Western narrative and that, when this happened, distinctions in content were made far bigger than they were in reality. More than investigating the specificity of forms in East European art, it has been given a place as the content of the Other. Barbarians, beasts, uncultured forms of being have been presented as New Primitives to be stared at, denying any literacy or possibility of art before that.⁴ The main characteristic of these shows was that they seemed more a reservation or a campus, a Zoo or Disneyland, than a review.

The grand finale of ten years of chrono-topological exhibitions that lacked a real concept, except that of the territorial Other, culminated with three authorised curatorial projects (Szeemann, Weibel and Block) on the subject of the Balkans, as the most radical and illustrative (hyper-realist) theme of East European otherness. History was expropriated and quickly digested, as Gržinić has noted.⁵ The worst effect was that it seemed not to be real, but a Western fiction of recent invention.

Reading backwards, two questions frame the absorption of East European art into the Western narrative; the first, 'Why has it happened now?', indicating the second, 'Why wasn't the Western art world interested in it on such a scale before (for example during the 1980s), even though the political situation allowed it?' Of course, the 'spectacle-production' was timed, not relying on the spectacular effect of art itself, but on the events in East European politics and economy, which were unfortunately more shocking than the artworks. The dynamics have shown that Western interest comes when there is an open market. But which market are we talking about in the case of East European art? The art market of course. But also another market: the history market. As well as artworks passing through a quick market standardisation, being evaluated and invested in, history is invented and sold again.

The Theft of History

This is not the first time, and that is how we know. Clement Greenberg's theory of avant-garde and kitsch presented socialism as a murderer of modernism, as 'low' culture, while Western neo- and post-isms were 'high' culture. This was the first expropriation of East European art history (I repeat; not art, but history, a tale, an explanation).⁶ Greenberg's narrative explained how, in spite of the USA not having a movement of the scale of East European modernism, it was the legal successor of it, on the basis of continuity. Unfortunately, this extremely corrupt élitist argument has also influenced events in East European art history, since as a result of it there is a focus on copies of the highly artistic Western avant-garde as a defence against that tragedy of mass culture called social realism, presented as an authentic East European historical product. Being ashamed of it, and actually trying to recapture the stolen history of modernism, has produced a form of colonial writing. East European art history has never managed to prove itself as being worthy and relevant. Instead, it has paid respect and shown devotion to modernism, but via USA minimalism.⁷

3. See for example the recent books, T. O. Benson (ed.), *Between Worlds: A Sourcebook of Central European Avant-Gardes 1910-1930*, MIT Press, Cambridge 2002; also T. O. Benson (ed.), *Central European Avant-Gardes: Exchange and Transformation, 1910-1930*, MIT Press, Cambridge 2002

4. A. Peraica: 'Auch Nach Sarajevo, Ferdinand! Symptome des "Vienerischen" und/oder des "Balkan" in der gegenwertigen Kultur', in *Springerin*, summer 2005, pp. 38-40

5. 'East/West Art, or the Possibility of a Better World', B. Langenberger in conversation with M. Gržinić, *The Arts and Civil Society Programme of Erste Bank Group in Central Europe*, in [kontakt.erstebankgroup.net/magazines/issue 2/stories/Interview+Marina+Grzinic](http://kontakt.erstebankgroup.net/magazines/issue%20stories/Interview+Marina+Grzinic)

6. C. Greenberg, 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch', in *Collected Essays and Criticism*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 1986

7. The case of 'the authentic Red Peristil' explained by the influence of American minimalism. See B. Jelenić, 'Bilješke u Suvremenu Splitsku Umjetnost', in *Preklop: art prospekt za sudjelovanje, preispitivanje i kritiku: 1-2*

Meanwhile, it has become clear that Greenberg's attitude was yet another example of cultural engineering of the history of modernism in the New Continent, with a complex relationship to history, as well as to the East European socialist states. Worst of all, this argument was not written by East European authors, but Western left-thinkers, who were critical of local cultural politics, and wrote about East European society — though paradoxically manoeuvring Western art and disregarding East European production.

Buck-Morss, in her otherwise great text *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: the Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West*, gives a micro-narrative of Malevich's *Black Square* as totally exhausted and commercialised by American minimalism.⁸ But she omits the constant reference in East European art to the same subject in the works of Belgrade Malevich, IRWIN (and NSK) or Tanja Ostojić, providing us with only one example of an East European work done in a gallery context.⁹ When the micro-narrative of Buck-Morss is compared to that of Gržinić's study of the East European relationship to the *Black Square*, we can see how history is written from both sides. Namely, one argument of Malevich's followers is not to acknowledge the author, but to use the square as 'unprotected' material for commercial purposes, while the other provides a reference, a quote that produces names but has no copyright, for non-commercial ends. One story cannot be subsumed under the other (East European into West), while the other seems to be a dependant and revolving story (Western into East European). Why does this happen?

Doubling Issues — Critical Perspectives

Comparing art historical writing by Gombrich, Payne sees Bal criticising that type of art history writing as 'elitist, sexist, racist and Eurocentric' which I would read as: Western, chauvinistic and based on an exclusive narrative.¹⁰ In the last decades, many writers have demanded the inclusion of other art histories that are simultaneous, but not synchronic to Western art history, criticising its reduction to a self-referent tale. This hasn't been done for East European art history, at least not methodologically. The reason is that East European art history was used with regard to Western art history in obviously political ways, as Greenberg's argument shows precisely in the context of the Cold War period.¹¹ To include East European art in the Western story meant not only to explore the reasons for the Cold War, at least those relevant to the arts, but also to indicate the difference between East European and Western art production, on the basis of a term not usually mentioned, omitted as irrelevant, actually shameful for the arts, i.e. commerce.

Despite some preliminary research in this direction, its conclusions never reached the establishment. Groys has managed to interpret Stalinism as the legacy of the modern aesthetics and, even more importantly, demystified the horror of social realism, and as a result solved two major problems of East European art-history writing. But Western authors have seen this as yet another fashion of interpretation.¹² Still today, two histories claim the continuity of modernism, one in an elitist museum context, the other in the engineering of society itself. Placed in opposition they give us quite a radical view of the history writing on both sides: revisionist practice and the theft of narrative. When compared, they not only raise the issue of the previously colonised narrative, but also of the legacy of the same questions once asked of East European art and now being asked of that of the West.

Only now can we ask: how can modernism, which is itself anti-museum be institutionalised in a museum context, as has happened with Malevich's work and with postmodern claims on the revival of modernism in the museum? Even more:

8. S. Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West*, MIT Press, Cambridge 2000

9. For a list of works, see M. Gržinić, *Situated Contemporary Art Practices: Art, Theory and Activism from (the East of) Europe*, Revolver and ZRC, Frankfurt/Main and Ljubljana 2004

10. M. Balvia-Payne et al. (eds.), *A Dictionary of Cultural and Critical Theory*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford and Cambridge 1996

11. S. Buck-Morss, *op. cit.*

12. *Ibid.*, writing on B. Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship and Beyond*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1992

how can postmodernism's demand to be institutionalised be seen as a continuity of modernism?¹³ These questions are actually leading to another question: why is the political in Western art claiming to be so, and at the same time criticising social realism? Despite asking the theoretical question, which can sound critical of some Western art forms from the 1980s in comparison to the simultaneous but not synchronous art of Eastern Europe, its institutions continue to behave in the old way towards the artwork itself. This was obvious in the case of Alexander Brener's intervention on Malevich, which raised the issue of the legality of the transaction which brought the collection of Malevich's work into the Stedelijk — another problem for East European modernism in the West. The debate was soon closed, despite attempts by East European artists to open up questions of the legality of possession, and also of historical reference.¹⁴

Furthermore, despite this work being interpreted in Western art history as an intervention in a museum context (Hal Foster has named it 'subversive') it was not similarly institutionalized.¹⁵ On the contrary, it was refused art status at all. From an East European perspective, a sharp cultural provocation, a real radical piece of interventionism in a museum context, was mis-interpreted in the Western narrative.¹⁶ The argument was that it came late to the art historical chapter entitled 'vandalism as art' on the West, confronted with the same Western art timing as the universal explanation.¹⁷

Still, the hegemony of interpretation, as in this case, cannot be explained without indicating the different time-scale than the one that doesn't acknowledge its own historical product (as social realism does) and paying a tribute to victimised modernism in Western history. It needs to be done systematically, showing that art production is framed by different kinds of political, social and economic parameters that cannot possibly produce the same type of narrative.

Socialism as the Logic of Production

If we concentrate on the issue of socialism as a completely different logic of production, political, economical, social and cultural environment, it is quite logical that the description of time will not be the same. In analogy to postmodern discourse, which Jameson has pointed out as being the cultural logic of late capitalism, we can try to see the ways that socialist art (or social realism more generally) is formed. In the diversity of forms, some of which resemble those in the West, socialist art is different by nature, as it is necessarily non-commercial, utopian, without copyright directives and authorial rights, but also, if under censorship, prescriptive rather than restrictive.¹⁸

The first and obvious reason, which Groys has again put forward, is that socialist art has an a-commercial nature, and in that sense is utopian and modernist in character. Distinguishing between the a-commercial as having no reference to commercial value at all, and non-commercial as being against the established commerce, we can examine more profound differences.¹⁹ A similar distinction appears with the issue of 'copyleft', usually attributed to East European (socialist) societies by Western (activist) discourses, which is actually implausible. Namely, there could not be copyleft in Eastern Europe, as there was no copyright in practice at all.²⁰

The two systems of art production can only be compared, but not correlated (except in the case of Yugoslavia, where, because of the economic flirting with capitalism, production has shown signs of connection, but still no real connectivity). But, instead of comparing them and attempting to formulate the 'main field' of

13. See H. Foster, 'Subversive Signs', in *Recordings — Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics*, The New Press, New York 1985, pp.99-121

14. IRWIN, Eda Čufer, Kasimir Malevich, etc.

15. H. Foster, *op. cit.*

16. D. Gamboni, 'Image to Destroy, Indestructible Image', in P. Weibel, B. Latour (eds.), *Iconoclasm*, ZKM, Karlsruhe and MIT Press, Cambridge 2002, pp.88-136

17. Obvious in Gamboni's interpretation.

18. S. C. Jansens, *Censorship. The Knot that Binds Power and Knowledge*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1991

19. B. Groys, M. Hollein (eds.), *Dream Factory Communism: The Visual Culture of the Stalin Era*, Schirn Kunsthalle and Hatje Cantz, Frankfurt/Main and Ostfildern 2004

20. A. Peraica, 'Osteuropäische Copymanie', in *Springerin*, Summer 2004, pp.26-30

history as a battlefield, it would be far better to reconstruct East European history as a unique field. Otherwise, just as social realism may seem to be a non-modernist style, though still quite a modernist form of production when compared to the West, some Western artworks dealing with the political may really look ridiculous when seen from an East European perspective.²¹ The reconstruction would also allow us the methodological claim that, if the artwork can be explained by the logic of East European production, then it should not be judged as something else by the West.

Pastiche and Tribute

The fact of the existent and non-existent market changes a lot in interpretation. Only with a liberal market can there be such a thing as copyright, based on the legacy and rights of market competition, and only then the name of the author becomes a brand that needs to maintain its own continuity. In the two cultural logics of mass society, one that has passed away, and the one that Eastern Europe is now entering, the main issue is precisely that of the copy, seen as a ground to differentiate between aesthetic systems.²²

Postmodernism has used pastiche, but East European societies have broken copyright laws in terms of the postmodern. The 'loss of respect for the original' in Eastern Europe (as for example in the case of Belgrade Malevich, which is actually an homage), cannot be analysed from the 'pastiche parody' distinction Frederic Jameson introduces as characteristic for the postmodern. Still, if they are analysed this way, they are putting forward a much deeper criticism of Western society, which seems to never really lose the traditional aspect of the original — a translation of the terms of the classic aesthetic *copia intacta* into the market version of copyright protection.

But, instead of engaging in a consistently late history or renewing the battlefield of the Cold War in the history of arts produced during that time, I am proposing to concentrate on another story, with its own heroes and styles ... the history of partisanship in the arts.

21. See L. R. Lippard, *Get the Message? A Decade of Art for Social Change*, E. P Dutton, New York 1984; see also H. Foster, 'For a Concept of the Political in Contemporary Art', in *Recordings — Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics*, New Press, New York 1985, pp.139-57

22. Some authors, like Walter Benjamin with his 1935 text 'Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', or more recently Jacques Rancière with *The Politics of Aesthetics* 2004 have attempted to discuss aesthetics in relationship to the copy.

On the Re-Politicisation of Art through Contamination

Marina Gržinić

In this essay I intend first to examine the post-socialist (transitional) condition of Eastern Europe in relation to issues of creativity and resistance. Next, I will offer some reflections on the (new) European identity in order to reformulate an idea of (Eastern) European art. Finally, I will suggest a certain oppositional conclusion. In doing this, I will take account of those practices and theoretical approaches that offer the only way forward for the contemporary situation, namely, that of changing our perspective on the relationship between art and theory through politics.

It will soon be obvious that I am insisting here on certain cartography. Its logic is conceptually akin to both Fredric Jameson's mapping processes and Brian Holmes's diagrams. I would also argue, via Holmes, that these diagrams display hierarchical relationships rather than simple networking. Although, according to Holmes, his complex *visualisations* of power and influence are almost enough to wake up the global public today, I am insisting here, on the contrary, on their constant re-politicisation.

In fact, I am insisting on the re-politicisation of art — that art should attempt to reconnect creativity and resistance. The capitalist art system and the art market are constantly trying to sever the dangerous liaison between creativity and resistance. This liaison frightens the capitalist cultural and educational machine; consequently, the global capitalist machine is constantly trying to *dissociate* creativity from resistance. The same is true today of universities and academies. The university is seen by contemporary state educational policy as a managerial enterprise. The ideal embodied in the educational policies of the post-industrial states is to transform educational institutions into efficient managerial organisations that are easy to control and that will produce, instead of thinking citizens, new generations of consumers (today, delicately renamed 'users') and effective bureaucrats. We cannot talk about any open democratic project in art and culture until we rethink the possibility of a radical artistic experience that would function as an open source and would be capable of switching to a radical political experience shared by the wider community.

1

In her essay 'The Twilight of the Victim: Creation Quits Its Pimp, to Rejoin Resistance', psychoanalyst Suely Rolnik, a professor at the Catholic University of São Paulo, where she directs the Centre for Research on Subjectivity, makes the following observations:

At present, certain artistic practices seem to be particularly effective in dealing with these problems [relating to the dissociation of creativity from resistance]. Their strategy consists of precise and subtle insertions at certain points where the social structure is separating, where tension is pulsating due to the pressure of a new composition of forces seeking passage. It is a mode of insertion mobilised by the desire to expose oneself to the other and to run the risk of such an exposure, instead of opting for the guarantee of a politically correct position that confines the other to a representation and protects subjectivity from any affective contagion. The 'work' consists in bringing the forces and the tension they provoke into existence, which entails the connection of the power of creation to a piece of the world grasped as energy-matter by the resonant body of the artist; and it consists at the same time in activating the power of resistance.

According to Rolnik, in order to understand these processes it is necessary to reconnect the power of creation with the power of resistance, and to free both from the pimp, the capitalist system:

We need to place ourselves in an area where politics and art are intertwined, where the resistant force of politics and the creative forces of art mutually affect each other, blurring the frontiers between them.

She proposes that we attempt to place ourselves in a thoroughly contaminated zone of activity:

First on the side of politics contaminated by its proximity to art, then on the side of art contaminated by its proximity to politics — in order to try to discern strategies of this kind.¹

The failed encounter between, on the one hand, theory, criticism and the institutional framework and, on the other, contemporary art occurred in Slovenia precisely in the field of resistance. I would even say that if there has been a missed encounter between contemporary art and theory, it is because theory failed to rearticulate creativity with resistance. To put it another way, what contemporary theory, criticism and official institutions all happily share is creativity, but it is creativity without resistance. This has also resulted in other important repercussions. It is inherently necessary for the capitalist machine to have new products and expressions of creativity, which means that new forms of art, as well as new forms of life, have to be constantly produced, according to Rolnik, in order to give all these structures (theory, criticism and official institutions) subjective consistency, while other artistic and cultural productions are swept off the stage along with entire deactivated sectors of the economy. This wellspring of 'free' inventive power has been discovered by contemporary capitalism as a virgin resource, an untapped vein of value to be exploited. To describe this process of giving fresh blood to the capitalist system while deactivating entire sectors of troubled artistic, cultural and social strategies, Rolnik introduces the formulation 'kidnapped inventions'; these are innovations that have been kidnapped by various kinds of systems, theories, criticism, institutions and practices.² Here we are speaking not only about the need to reconnect art and life, as was the case in the modern period, for, as Rolnik puts it,

1. S. Rolnik, 'The Twilight of the Victim: Creation Quits Its Pimp, to Rejoin Resistance', in *Zehar*, n° 51, 2003, p. 36. The journal *Zehar* is online at www.arteleku.net

2. *Ibid.*, p. 35

If art and life are still divided, it's no longer because of the deactivation of creation in the broad sweep of social life and its confinement to the artistic ghetto. That situation has already been resolved by capitalism, much more effectively than it ever was by art.³

To simply remain in the ghetto of art, as a separate sphere to which the power of creation was confined in the earlier regime, means to keep art dissociated from the power of resistance, and to limit it to being merely a source of value, from which its pimp, capitalism, can make an easy living. I would emphasise that we have to think in a much broader sense about the pimp, capitalism, and take into account its links with the art market, art institutions, theory, criticism, tourism and educational institutions, from art academies to universities. What is, in fact, happening today in contemporary art is the formation of a specific set of technologies for de- and/or re-territorialising capitalism, which puts into process the re-articulation of hierarchical structures that include people as a component and which integrates and exteriorises people and their practices in accordance with institutional models.

The new vocabulary proposed by Rolnik — which in addition to 'kidnapped invention' includes such terms as 'contamination of art and politics', 'contagious art practices', 'radicalised theory' — has rarely been used before in the field of art and culture. But if we consider certain events in the art, culture and social-political arenas of Slovenia, on the local level, and more broadly in relation to *Documenta* and the various biennials, such as *Manifesta* and the big Balkan shows, we can see the importance of using such paradigms to name in precise terms the processes of expropriation and exhaustion, abstraction and evacuation that are taking place in contemporary art and culture.

What Rolnik calls 'kidnapped invention' is exactly what happened to the 'underground' or 'alternative movement' that developed in the 1980s in Slovenia. This movement was literally kidnapped, taken hostage, and released when it was already symbolically dead, abstracted from interpretations and segregated by academic writings and theoretical non-writings beginning in the 1990s and continuing today. Throughout the 1980s, the whole underground, or alternative culture, in Ljubljana was kept under harsh political and economic censorship, a hostage of the communist political sphere, which was cut off from any kind of social space. This same underground was of crucial importance in the formation of the civil society of the 1980s, which supported the emergence of numerous heavily marginalised sexual, political and cultural minorities. A good indication of the present state of affairs may be seen in the fact that a recent book about the period, *Punk je bil prej* (*Punk was before*), published in 2003,⁴ has not yet received a single serious theoretical or critical review in Slovenia.

What is more, these alternative practices were not merely evacuated and abstracted, they were literally 'kidnapped' — excluded or marginalised — at least twice and in very blatant ways. The first time was in 1997, when the city of Ljubljana was declared the 'Cultural Capital of Europe' — precisely because of its reputation in the 1980s and early 1990s for non-institutional strategies that were, for the most part, conceptualised, produced and organised within the alternative and, later, independent spaces. The event proved to be a disaster for the independent scene, which was left without any infrastructural investments or a substantial programme. The second 'kidnapping' took place in 2000, when *Manifesta 3* was held in Ljubljana. Although proclaimed as a pure act of transnational and global artistic vision, *Manifesta 3* was, in fact, commissioned by the Slovene state, government and

3. *Ibid.*

4. P. Mlakar, I. Vidmar, (eds.), *Punk je bil prej: 25 let punka pod Slovenci* (*Punk was before: 25 years of punk among the Slovenes*), Cankarjeva založba, Ljubljana 2003

Ministry of Culture, along with the main managerial artistic and cultural institutions in Ljubljana, and not the other way around. *Manifesta*, with its external reinforcements, legitimised on an international level the power of the major national institutions of art and culture in Ljubljana (led by Cankarjev dom). Once more, the leading independent (!) institutions, such as the škuc Gallery, Metelkova and the Kapelica Gallery, which had been crucial to the establishment of contemporary political art and new media production in Slovenia, were not included in the *Manifesta* project. *Manifesta* offered a perfect guise for the codification and acceptance of fake and abstract internationalism in the so-called national realm.

As Rolnik argues:

At issue here is an operation of great complexity that can intervene at different stages in the process of creation, and not only at the end. Its effect at that point is just more obvious, because it coincides with the moment when the dissociation makes itself felt on art's products, reifying them in two ways: either transforming them into 'art objects' separated from the vital process whereby the creation was carried out, or treating them as sources of a surplus glamour-value, attached to the logos of businesses and even of cities, like Bilbao, for instance.⁵

Rolnik cites the example of Bilbao with its Guggenheim museum building to illustrate the operation of evacuating resistance from creativity, which transforms the object of art into a pure trademark. For Slovenes, this is precisely what occurred in 1997 and 2000 in Ljubljana.

The case of Metelkova represents an intermediary point in this genealogy of the dissociation of creativity from resistance. The situation may be summarised as follows. Metelkova is the name of a street in Ljubljana on which the barracks of the Yugoslav People's Army were located. After Slovenia's ten-day war for independence, in June–July 1991, the Yugoslav army withdrew from Slovenia. In that same year the new generation of underground hard-core punk activists and independent artists and activist groups asked the City Council of Ljubljana to give this former military complex of empty buildings to independent artistic and cultural organisations. After promising to do so, Ljubljana City Council secretly reneged and began demolition of the Metelkova buildings with the aim of constructing a commercial centre on the site. From 1993, activists, intellectuals and artists occupied the area as a squat, and to this day it remains a site of conflict between the independent art and cultural scene and Ljubljana City Council. In 1993, the municipal authorities cut off the water and electricity supplies to Metelkova in an attempt to put a stop to the cultural activities and to force the activists, intellectuals and artists to leave the squat. By depriving the activists and artists of basic services, the city essentially took Metelkova hostage. The city of Ljubljana then 'kidnapped' the Metelkova proposal for organising the area as a central cultural and artistic space in Ljubljana for the new millennium. In fact, the city is now financially supporting the development of the Metelkova site by constructing a complex of museums there.

It is necessary to rethink Metelkova within the context of a bio-politics through which the state produces and administers the life of its citizens. Giorgio Agamben argues that global states today play with and against two entities of life: modal life and bare (non-modal, naked) life. Modal life exists in Western democratic states in the form of freedom of choice, quality of life, and consumer life. Bare life, on the other hand, is life that serves only as the foundation of sovereignty. According

5. S. Rolnik, *op. cit.*, p. 36

to Agamben, the foundation of sovereignty is, then, based on a concept of bare life; the sovereign body fulfils its role of being sovereign based on its right to take or give/permit life (rights or quality of life) to citizens.⁶ This is what happened with Metelkova when, in the 1990s, the city of Ljubljana cut the electricity and water supplies. The kidnapped Metelkova citizens were transformed through this clear bio-political action into *denizens*, or 'denied citizens', to borrow a term from Tomas Hammar.⁷

Šefik Šeki Tatlić, a theoretician and media activist from Sarajevo, helps us to develop this even further:

Besides the illegal practice of Guantanamo existence... what displays sovereignty is a model where bare-life is not destroyed, but converted, exposed as a cultural practice of life-with-modality in cases where Western pop and heavy metal music allegedly have been used to torture prisoners and may serve as a banal example or a display of the power of sovereignty where cultural practice is displayed as a weapon by exposing differentiation.⁸

If we consider the recent construction, in 2003 in Metelkova, of the youth hostel Celica ('cell') — whereby the former Yugoslav army barracks prison was renovated, with financial support from the city of Ljubljana, into a shiny youth-hostel theme park, painted in shades of red, yellow and orange — we see just such a turnaround. This can be understood as the city re-establishing subtle control over partially autonomous spaces without the open use of force and in a way that is directly related to the systematic gentrification politics of the contemporary city and state.⁹ As a result of these processes of evacuation, the alternative scene was literally swallowed up and exhausted by over-institutionalised (official) culture in Slovenia, while theory was usurped and commercialised by the capitalist system (a pimp indeed, as Rolnik puts it), becoming part of the theory industry.

Rolnik theorises such processes in precise terms:

In order to extract maximum profitability from this inventive power, capitalism pushes it even further than it would go by means of its own internal logic, but only to make an ever more perverse use of it: like a pimp, it exploits the force of invention at the service of an accumulation of surplus value, taking advantage of it and thus reiterating its alienation with respect to the life process that engendered it — an alienation that separates it from the force of resistance. On the one hand, you have a turbo-charged inventive power freed of its relation to resistance, and on the other, a tension. Easy-to-assimilate 'ready-to-wear identities' are accompanied by a powerful marketing operation concocted and distributed by the media, so as to make us believe that identifying with these idiotic images and consuming them is the only way to succeed in reconfiguring a territory, and even more, that this is the only channel by which one can belong to the sought-after territory of a 'luxury subjectivity'. And this is no trivial matter, for outside such a territory one runs the risk of social death, by exclusion, humiliation, destitution, or even the risk of literally dying — the risk of falling into the sewer of 'trash subjectivities', with their horror scenarios made up of war, slums, drug trafficking, kidnapping, hospital queues, undernourished children,

6. See G. Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2004, cited in Š. Š. Tatlić, 'Post-Modal Reproduction of Power', in M. Gržinić (ed.), *Art-e-Fact: Strategies of Resistance*, n° 3, 2004, published online at artefact.mi2.hr

7. See T. Hammar, *Democracy and the Nation State*, Research and Ethnic Relations Series, Dartmouth 1990

8. Š. Š. Tatlić, *op. cit.*

9. See R. Mayer, K. Lampert, M. Hille, 'Example Celica, YOUTH HOSTEL, Metelkova, Ljubljana', in M. Gržinić, (ed.), *The Future of Computers Arts*, Maska, Ljubljana and MKC, Maribor 2004

the homeless, the landless, the shirtless, the paperless, those people who can only be less, an ever-expanding territory. If trash subjectivity continuously experiences the distressing humiliation of an existence without value, luxury subjectivity for its part continuously experiences the threat of falling outside, into sewer-territory, a fall which may be irreversible. The prospect terrifies it and leaves it agitated and anxious, desperately seeking recognition.¹⁰

Are not the stories we receive daily through the mass media evidence enough of the deepening gap between these two subjectivities? In Slovenia, for example, we witness the horrors of the life and sheer chaos endured by the Roma people, as well as by others such as the 'erased'. Abroad, in the world at large, we see the horrors of wars supposedly intended to preserve civilisation, as well as such atrocities as decapitations, and many other kinds of misery.

The most appalling situation in Slovenia is that of the *izbrisani*, the 'erased'. On 26 February 1992, eight months after declaring independence from Yugoslavia, the new Republic of Slovenia deleted some 28,000 residents from its civil registries. This happened long after hostilities between Slovenia and Yugoslavia had ended, so war cannot be used as an excuse for the mass cancellation of these residents' legal status. These people, eventually known as the 'erased', are not ethnic Slovenians, but rather Serbs, Croats, Bosnian Muslims, Albanian Kosovars, Roma, and others originally from other parts of the former Yugoslavia who had lived and worked in Slovenia for many years (some of them for decades). Now suddenly, they were deprived of all official status in Slovenia. Their citizenship papers were confiscated, destroyed, removed or invalidated, which meant that other official documents were now also invalid; as a result, they found themselves deprived of the right to work, the right to have social insurance, and, to put it simply, the right to live a normal life (to go to the doctor, receive a pension, etc.).

There are many ways to name this massive violation of human rights, this murderous act of social policy by the Slovenian state: soft genocide, administrative genocide, administrative ethnic cleansing, civil death, mass denationalisation, and so on. These are all examples of social and political subtraction, elimination, of the de- and re-territorialisation of bodies and lives, the eradication of rights and the removal of basic necessities. What we are dealing with here is almost a textbook case of contemporary bio-politics.

As a result of this policy, some 12,000 members of the targeted groups (out of approximately 30,000) left Slovenia. The 18,000 'erased' who remain in Slovenia exist, as it were, between two deaths: a physical one, since without papers they cannot function, and a symbolic one, resulting from the horrific psychological pressure of being expelled from the social context, cut off from their own families and from all manifestations of public life.

Such expressions of dominance over bare (naked) lives allows the political oligarchy in transitional societies to constitute itself as sovereign, to demonstrate the practice of sovereignty to the nation. As Tatlić explains:

Post-socialist and former Eastern European societies perceive global capitalism not through future inequalities, class divisions, but with a willingness to prepare their states/economies to adopt global capitalism. European Union demands from transitional societies are seen as an implementation of several extremes, such as, for example, the

10. S. Rolnik, *op. cit.*, p. 35

implementation of an information society, but with the false predisposition that it is a mere technological structure, followed by extreme economic imbalances, extreme class divisions, fascistic nationalistic regimes decoded as mere figures in endless political games, with the following unequal distribution of knowledge to certain local social structures which conduct the whole process.¹¹

The bio-political in Slovenia decodes itself in a way that, as Tatlić says,

firstly patches its own linear progress toward modal civilizations by accepting a 'non-repressive' democracy, but only as a countermeasure to the former, 'repressive', communism. Functioning as a fictional platform, which if read through post-modernist practices, works as collective phantasm: the West should accept us, because we were oppressed by communism.¹²

The process is completed, first, by taking advantage of the deepening gap and, then, by strengthening different political positions and developing fake solutions, which are ultimately processed through the mass media.

2

Let me propose a further theoretical and political positioning. The idea of this positioning, of taking a (conceptually) specific ground, is to philosophically denote and articulate a proper Eastern European position. This idea is not grounded in the simple game of identity politics, whereby specific monsters/entities search for their rights in cyberspace; rather it is a militant response to the constant process of fragmentation and particularisation. What is more, I insist on the re-politicisation of the cyberworld by taking a ground that is not a physical space or a location on the geographical map of the New Europe, but, as Edward Said would say, a ground that is a concept, a paradigm of such a space. My rethinking of the position of contemporary (post-)feminism and gender theories is also a direct answer to the frequent populist remark that today is not the time to distinguish between East and West (Europe), since thanks to the ideology of globalisation it is only one's home that matters: 'No East, no West, home is the best!' Despite the ideological blindness of such a statement, which fails to take into account the claustrophobic tendency and totalitarian flavour intrinsic to every ideology of intimacy, we must again ask, where is this home? If we have a home, in which spiritual or conceptual context is it located?

Instead of representing myself as an academically gender-positioned female writer, and therefore as a (cyber) feminist from Eastern Europe, I propose a radical reversal in the possible interpretation of this Eastern European position or paradigm. I would like to articulate my proper Eastern European position (or if you prefer Lyotard's term, my 'Eastern European condition') as a (post-)feminist — a cyberfeminist.¹³ Eastern Europe is to be seen as a woman, or as the female side in the process of sexual differentiation and in the grounding of ourselves in the real world or the cyberworld. At the start of the third millennium, this can be perceived as the militant theorisation of a particular position in the crucial debate over ways, modes and, last but not least, protocols for entering the (cyber)space of hopes, uselessness, theory and terror.

'Eastern Europe' has always been subjected to different readings.¹⁴ It was often viewed as a land of romantic mythological events. Seen through a Marxist-

11. Š. Š. Tatlić, *op. cit.*

12. *Ibid.*

13. See M. Gržinić, 'A theoretical-political positioning of philosophy, media and cyberfeminism', in C. Reiche, A. Sick (eds.), *Technics of cyber<feminism* <mode=message>, *Thealit Frauen.Kultur. Labor*, Bremen 2002, pp.141-54

14. See M. Gržinić, 'Encountering the Balkan. The radicalisation of positioning', in G. Maraniello (ed.), *Art in Europe: 1990-2000*, Skira, Milan 2002, pp.115-26

Leninist filter, the region's technological backwardness offered the myth of a grand brotherly community and total sexual freedom (which was, due to its materialist nature, devoid of ethics and morals and thus capable of the worst sins) or an exclusively totalitarian project and the realisation of an Eastern despotism in which poverty and misery reign amid endless rivers of mucus and blood. It is this last myth that over the past fifteen years has assumed its most horrific form as it has moved from the realm of the symbolic to that of the real, even as we all still hoped it would remain nothing but a Western fantasy. The events in the former Yugoslavia are examples of this materialisation, the entry of the real into the place of the symbolic. We should also consider in this regard of the influx of refugees and illegal immigrants, especially if we think of the European Union integration processes that have forced former Eastern European states to become police watchdogs, as well as disintegration procedures (the need to have the right kind of passport) and, last but not least, the wars in the Balkans and the former Soviet Union. It is this situation, and the changes in the East that have brought about a new view of Europe. A reading of the East on the part of the West is exemplified by an absence of communication and with an attitude of 'looking but not seeing, listening but not hearing'. This attitude continued throughout most of the recent events as people in the former Yugoslavia died by the thousands and sought refuge by the millions. Although all this was happening in the heart of Europe, this same Europe could repudiate its heartland, for it renamed it 'the Balkans'. Due to the recent atrocities, some people have given up the pleasure of contemplative and philosophical reading. With reference to history, philosophy (Kant) and the arts, we can elaborate the idea of Eastern Europe as the indivisible remainder of all European atrocities. Eastern Europe is a piece of shit and the bloody symptom of the political, cultural and epistemological failures of the twentieth century.

For the East, only one subject is topical: History — the re-appropriation of history. The whole socialist machine was aimed at neutralising the side effects of a relevant interpretation of its reality and of art production, at covering up history, effacing and renaming it. At the discursive level, this was a struggle for the formation and interpretation of the history of Eastern Europe, for a re-appropriation of the history of socialism by the East as well as by the West.

What we are dealing with now is a deconstruction and a renewed construction of the same history, but a history which is now augmented by thoughts, images and facts that have so far been inexpressible. What we are interested in is the 'internal re-articulation' that is being engendered beyond the neo-colonial positions of the West, the one that lives 'here', without being recognised as such. What we are witnessing is a process of mirroring and the reflection of one's own self and one's own 'Eastern' position, in which the recycling of different histories does not refer to Western but to Eastern positions and conditions.

An alternative history of the East of Europe signifies a demand for the redefinition of relations within the contemporary constructions and relations of power.

3

At present, I can state that there is an anthropological machine operating at the base of globalisation and it is developing a secret connection between man and animal. The idea is to make them both more human; humanisation is the basis of this connection. This idea of humanity is the idea of Being and its inclusion in civilisation. But who decides what is human and at what point non-humans should take part in the process of humanisation? It's the capitalist machine, of course!

In his 2002 book *The Open: Man and Animal*, Giorgio Agamben in fact warns us that it may be time to insist on the dissolution, or better yet, the separation, of the connection between man and animal.¹⁵ This animal can also be seen as the body of the modern slave. Rather than imagining the slave in the Roman Empire, one can, in the present context, think about the body of the immigrant or the refugee, paperless and poor, as well as the rest of the proletarian population. Agamben proposes a break with this constant hybridisation. To be left out of the anthropological machine, not to be saved — this is our only possible salvation. Not to be part of the process of capitalist humanisation, to be left out of Being, is perhaps the only possible way to have a decent existence.

'Outside of Being' is, in fact, the title of the last chapter of Agamben's book. Let me now briefly, but at a deep level, try to establish a possible genealogy behind the 'Outside of Being' that Agamben proposes. I will put forward the following thesis. In the history of modern philosophy, three books, or positions of thought, have marked the way we understand Being (*Sein*), which Derrida defines as 'we and our life'. These books are Heidegger's *Being and Time* 1927, Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* 1943 and Alain Badiou's *Being and the Event* 1988.¹⁶ To this list, I would add Agamben's 'Outside of Being' chapter from *The Open* (2002). Heidegger's *Being and Time* is about the (Western) temporisation of History. Sartre's Being is about nothingness in relation to the Holocaust, although I would agree with Derrida that Sartre's 'nothingness' is only a modality of being — something as nothing.

Alain Badiou made a break in the line of Being by means of 'the event'. In 1998, Françoise Proust defined Badiou's event as a break with the house of Western philosophy, which resembles the capitalist anthropological machine in theory and philosophy.¹⁷ Badiou is well aware that the house of Western philosophy resembles the anthropological machine that is today compelled to engage in what is merely empty panic-stricken rotation, producing the total evacuation of histories and practices that are outside of the first capitalist world. Proust describes this house of philosophy as Western metaphysics, which has been transformed into an airless house that stifles our breathing. Badiou's event is, according to Proust, the gesture of opening a window, or more precisely, windows, so as to breathe again. But isn't this merely an attempt to bring fresh air into what remains the same, unchanged, old house of Western metaphysics?

In this trajectory we can identify other paths, or modifications, through history in relation to Being. We might consider the Deleuzian never-ending of Being, as Being in the process of Becoming. Derrida introduced the notion of *différance*. It claims difference by means of a single character ('a' instead of 'e'). Within this context, Badiou made a far more radical gesture. He at least tried to start to think about Being from the beginning. Badiou's event should be perceived as something similar to the gesture of the professor who, after listening to us and making corrections, tells us, 'Once more from the beginning, please.' But the text, the house, and the single (solely Western) history remain the same!

I would argue that such moves lead to a modification in the Western institution of metaphysics, or in the great philosophical and civilisational edifice, but in the final instance, the edifice remains unchanged. Agamben is the one, then, who provides us with the most radical gesture. Agamben's 'Outside of Being' is not the simple gesture of opening windows within the old anthropological house. What he tells us is that in order to be saved we have to leave the house entirely! To get Outside of Being! To go Outside of Being may itself be perceived as Badiou's radical event, one that was, indeed, invoked by the philosopher himself.

15. See footnote n°6

16. A. Badiou, *L'être et l'événement*, Editions du Seuil, Paris 1988

17. F. Proust, 'Kaj je dogodek' (What is the event?), in *Filozofski vestnik/Acta Philosophica*, Vol.19, n°1, Ljubljana 1998, pp.9-19

It is important to understand that this Outside of Being is not a gesture of foreclosure, of being suddenly dragged into a queer space without time, or outside of time. It does not mean finding ourselves in some weird suspension of time. To go Outside of Being means to open ourselves to another temporality. Or to be even more precise, to begin the projection of a completely different film, and not to spend time, as Badiou's suggests, on redefining a single sequence, even if it is the opening sequence. To go Outside of Being is to be open not towards the space of Otherness, but toward the Other, the Second, the Third Space.

A good example of this is IRWIN's project *East Art Map*, as it materialised in 2002. In this, a history of avant-garde art from the former Eastern Europe is reconstructed through hundreds of images and references. Taking its cue from Alfred H. Barr's seminal diagram illustrating the development of Western abstract art, IRWIN's *East Art Map* is a retrospective (re)construction and mapping of Eastern European Art (1920–2001). It also implies placing a radical hold on the process of historicisation that is taking place too quickly (equal to the process of forgetting) of different spaces, places and territories in the world. The *East Art Map* makes visible what was for decades beyond the gaze of Western (first capitalist world) history. The *East Art Map* is important, as it offers a way of perceiving the (new) avant-garde movement not simply as the space of (disturbing) Otherness, but as the Other space. With this project we can perhaps think about Aesthetics in a new productive form, namely, Easthetics.

To offer a kind of a coded order, then, we can read the story of Being and of the mad anthropological machine of humanisation run by capitalism in the following way:

- Badiou: beginning (with his event, he wants to re-question once again the beginning of the edifice of Being and asks us to start from the beginning)
- Deleuze: becoming (he insists on the never-ending becoming of Being)
- Derrida: différance (he establishes a difference of Being)
- Agamben: Outside of Being

Agamben is aware that the anthropological machine of Being rotates today uniquely and solely as a mad machine that nobody can correct or improve (despite efforts at rethinking it from the beginning or in its never-ending becoming and/or difference), which is why he suggests an end to it — outside of being.

Can Lenin Tell Us About Freedom Today? Slavoj Žižek

Today, even the self-proclaimed post-Marxist radicals endorse the gap between ethics and politics, relegating politics to the domain of doxa, of pragmatic considerations and compromises which always and by definition fall short of the unconditional ethical demand. The notion of a politics which would not have been a series of mere pragmatic interventions, but the politics of Truth, is dismissed as totalitarian. The break from this deadlock, the reassertion of a politics of Truth today, should take the form of a return to Lenin. Why Lenin, why not simply Marx? Is the proper return not the return to origins proper? Today, 'returning to Marx' is already a minor academic fashion. Which Marx do we get in these returns? On the one hand, the Cultural Studies Marx, the Marx of the postmodern sophists, of the Messianic promise; on the other hand, the Marx who foretold the dynamic of today's globalisation and who is as such evoked even on Wall Street. What both Marxs have in common is the denial of politics proper; the reference to Lenin enables us to avoid these two pitfalls.

There are two features which distinguish his intervention. First, one cannot emphasise enough the fact of Lenin's externality with regard to Marx: he was not a member of Marx's 'inner circle' of the initiated, he never met either Marx or Engels; moreover, he came from a land at the Eastern borders of European 'civilization'. (This externality is part of the standard Western racist argument against Lenin: he introduced into Marxism the Russian-Asiatic 'despotic principle'; in one remove further, Russians themselves disown him, pointing towards his Tatar origins.) It is only possible to retrieve the theory's original impulse from this external position, in exactly the same way that St. Paul, who formulated the basic tenets of Christianity, was not part of Christ's inner circle, and Lacan accomplished his 'return to Freud' using as leverage a totally distinct theoretical tradition. (Freud was aware of this necessity, which is why he put his trust in Jung as a non-Jew, an outsider — to break out of the Jewish initiated community. His choice was bad, because Jungian theory functioned in itself as initiated wisdom; it was Lacan who succeeded where Jung failed.) So, in the same way that St. Paul and Lacan reinscribe the original teaching into a different context (St. Paul reinterprets Christ's crucifixion as his triumph; Lacan reads Freud through the mirror-stage Saussure), Lenin violently displaces Marx, tears his theory out of its original context, planting it in another historical moment, and thus effectively universalises it.

Second, it is only through such a violent displacement that the original theory can be put to work, fulfilling its potential of political intervention. It is significant that the work in which Lenin's unique voice was clearly heard for the first time is *What Is To Be Done?* — the text which exhibits Lenin's unconditional will to intervene in the

situation, not in the pragmatic sense of 'adjusting the theory to the realistic claims through necessary compromises', but, on the contrary, in the sense of dispelling all opportunistic compromises, of adopting the unequivocal radical position from which it is only possible to intervene in such a way that our intervention changes the coordinates of the situation. The contrast here is clear with regard to today's Third Way 'postpolitics', which emphasises the need to leave behind old ideological divisions and to confront new issues, armed with the necessary expert knowledge and free deliberation that takes into account people's concrete needs and demands.

As such, Lenin's politics is the true counterpoint not only to the Third Way pragmatic opportunism, but also to the marginalist Leftist attitude of what Lacan called *le narcissisme de la chose perdue*. What a true Leninist and a political conservative have in common is the fact that they reject what one could call liberal Leftist irresponsibility (advocating grand projects of solidarity, freedom, etc., yet ducking out when one has to pay the price for it in the guise of concrete and often cruel political measures): like an authentic conservative, a true Leninist is not afraid to act, to assume all the consequences, unpleasant as they may be, of realising his political project. Rudyard Kipling (whom Brecht admired) despised British liberals who advocated freedom and justice, while silently counting on the Conservatives to do the necessary dirty work for them; the same can be said for the liberal Leftists' (or 'democratic socialists') relationship towards Leninist Communists: liberal Leftists reject the Social Democratic 'compromise', they want a true revolution, yet they shirk from the actual price to be paid for it and thus prefer to adopt the attitude of a Beautiful Soul and to keep their hands clean. In contrast to this false radical Leftists' position (who want true democracy for the people, but without the secret police to fight counter-revolution, without their academic privileges being threatened), a Leninist, like a Conservative, is authentic in the sense of fully assuming the consequences of his choice, i.e. of being fully aware of what it actually means to take power and to exert it.

The return to Lenin is the endeavour to retrieve the unique moment when a thought already transposes itself into a collective organisation, but does not yet fix itself into an Institution (the established Church, the IPA, the Stalinist Party-State). It aims neither at nostalgically re-enacting the 'good old revolutionary times', nor at the opportunistic pragmatic adjustment of the old programme to new conditions, but at repeating, in the present world-wide conditions, the Leninist gesture of initiating a political project that would undermine the totality of the global liberal-capitalist world order, and, furthermore, a project that would unabashedly assert itself as acting on behalf of truth, as intervening in the present global situation from the standpoint of its repressed truth. What Christianity did with regard to the Roman Empire, this global multiculturalist polity, we should do with regard to today's Empire.¹

How, then, do things stand with freedom? In a polemic against the Mensheviks' criticism of Bolshevik power in 1920, Lenin answered the claim of one of the critics — 'So, gentlemen Bolsheviks, since, before the Revolution and your seizure of power, you pleaded for democracy and freedom, be so kind as to permit us now to publish a critique of your measures!' — with the acerbic: 'Of course, gentlemen, you have all the freedom to publish this critique — but, then, gentlemen, be so kind as to allow us to line you up against the wall and shoot you!' This Leninist freedom of choice — not 'Life or money!' but 'Life or critique!' —, combined with Lenin's dismissive attitude towards the 'liberal' notion of freedom, accounts for his bad reputation among liberals. Their case largely rests upon their rejection of the standard Marxist-Leninist opposition of 'formal' and 'actual' freedom: as even Leftist

1. See M. Hardt, A. Negri, *Empire*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2000

liberals like Claude Lefort emphasise again and again, freedom is in its very notion 'formal', so that 'actual' freedom equals the lack of freedom.² That is to say, with regard to freedom, Lenin is best remembered for his famous retort 'Freedom — yes, but for WHOM? To do WHAT?' — for him, in the above-quoted case of the Mensheviks, their 'freedom' to criticise the Bolshevik government effectively amounted to 'freedom' to undermine the workers' and peasants' government on behalf of the counter-revolution ... Today, after the terrifying experience of the 'really existing socialism', is it not more than obvious where the fault of this reasoning resides? First, it reduces a historical constellation to a closed, fully contextualised, situation in which the 'objective' consequences of one's acts are fully determined ('independently of your intentions, what you are doing now objectively serves ...'); secondly, the position of enunciation of such statements usurps the right to decide what your acts 'objectively mean', so that their apparent 'objectivism' (the focus on 'objective meaning') is the form of appearance of its opposite, the thorough subjectivism: I decide what your acts objectively mean, since I define the context of a situation (say, if I conceive of my power as the immediate equivalent/expression of the power of the working class, then everyone who opposes me is 'objectively' an enemy of the working class). Against this full contextualisation, one should emphasise that freedom is 'actual' precisely and only as the capacity to 'transcend' the coordinates of a given situation, to 'posit the presuppositions' of one's activity (as Hegel would have put it), i.e. to redefine the very situation within which one is active. Furthermore, as many a critic pointed out, the very term 'really existing socialism', although it was coined in order to assert socialism's success, is in itself a proof of socialism's utter failure, i.e. of the failure of the attempt to legitimise socialist regimes — the term 'really existing socialism' popped up at the historical moment when the only legitimising reason for socialism was the mere fact that it exists ...

Is this, however, the whole story? How does freedom effectively function in liberal democracies themselves? Although Clinton's presidency epitomises the Third Way of today's (ex-)Left succumbing to the Rightist ideological blackmail, his healthcare reform programme would nonetheless amount to this kind of act, at least in today's conditions, since it would have been based on the rejection of the hegemonic notions of the need to curtail Big State expenditure and administration — in a way, it would 'do the impossible'. No wonder, then, that it failed: its failure — perhaps the only significant, although negative, event of Clinton's presidency — bears witness to the material force of the ideological notion of free choice. That is to say, although the large majority of the so-called ordinary people were not properly acquainted with the reform programme, the medical lobby (twice as strong as the infamous defense lobby!) succeeded in imposing on the public the fundamental idea that, with universal healthcare, free choice (in matters concerning medicine) will be somehow threatened — against this purely fictional reference to 'free choice', all enumeration of hard facts (in Canada, healthcare is less expensive and more effective, with no less free choice, etc.) proved ineffective.

We are here at the very nerve centre of the liberal ideology: freedom of choice, grounded in the notion of the psychological subject endowed with propensities she or he strives to realise. And this especially holds today, in the era of what sociologists like Ulrich Beck call 'risk society',³ when the ruling ideology endeavours to sell us the very insecurity caused by the dismantling of the Welfare State as the opportunity for new freedoms: you have to change job every year, relying on short-term contracts instead of a long-term stable appointment? Why not see it as the liberation from the constraints of a fixed job, as the chance to reinvent yourself again and again, to

2. See C. Lefort, *Democracy and Political Theory*, Minnesota University Press, Minneapolis 1988

3. See U. Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, Sage, London 1992

become aware of and realise hidden potentials of your personality? You can no longer rely on the standard health insurance and retirement plan, so you have to opt for additional coverage for which you have to pay? Why not perceive it as an additional opportunity to choose: either better life now or long-term security? And if this predicament causes you anxiety, the postmodern or 'second modernity' ideologist will immediately accuse you of being unable to assume full freedom, of the escape from freedom, of the immature sticking to old stable forms. Even better, when this is inscribed into the ideology of the subject as the psychological individual pregnant with natural abilities and tendencies, then I as it were automatically interpret all these changes as the result of my personality, not as the result of me being thrown around by the market forces.

Phenomena like these make it all the more necessary today to REASSERT the opposition of formal and actual freedom in a new, more precise, sense. What we need today, in the era of the liberal hegemony, is a Leninist *Traité de la servitude libérale*, a new version of la Boétie's *Traité de la servitude volontaire* that would fully justify the apparent oxymoron 'liberal totalitarianism'. In experimental psychology, Jean-Léon Beauvois made the first step in this direction, with his precise exploration of the paradoxes of conferring on the subject the freedom to choose.⁴ Repeated experiments established the following paradox: if, AFTER getting from two groups of volunteers the agreement to participate in an experiment, one informs them that the experiment will involve something unpleasant, against their ethics even, and if, at this point, one reminds the first group that they have the free choice to say no, and one says to the other group nothing, in BOTH groups, the SAME (very high) percentage will agree to continue their participation in the experiment. What this means is that conferring the formal freedom of choice does not make any difference: those given the freedom will do the same thing as those (implicitly) denied it. This, however, does not mean that the reminder/bestowal of the freedom of choice does not make any difference: those given the freedom of choice will not only tend to choose the same as those denied it; on top of that, they will tend to rationalise their 'free' decision to continue to participate in the experiment — unable to endure the so-called cognitive dissonance (their awareness that they FREELY acted against their interests, propensities, tastes or norms), they will tend to change their opinion about the act they were asked to accomplish. Let us say that an individual is first asked to participate in an experiment that concerns changing their eating habits in order to fight against famine; then, after agreeing to do it, at the first encounter in the laboratory, he will be asked to swallow a living worm, with the explicit reminder that, if he finds this act repulsive, he can, of course, say no, since he has the full freedom to choose. In most cases, he will do it, and then rationalise it by way of saying to himself something like: 'What I am asked to do is disgusting, but I am not a coward, I should display some courage and self-control, otherwise scientists will perceive me as a weak person who pulls out at the first minor obstacle! Furthermore, a worm does have a lot of proteins and it could effectively be used to feed the poor — who am I to hinder such an important experiment because of my petty sensitivity? And, finally, maybe my disgust of worms is just a prejudice, maybe a worm is not so bad — and would tasting it not be a new and daring experience? What if it will enable me to discover an unexpected, slightly perverse, dimension of myself that I was hitherto unaware of?'

Beauvois enumerates three modes of what brings people to accomplish such an act which runs against their perceived propensities and/or interests: authoritarian (the pure command 'You should do it because I say so, without questioning it!')

4. See J. -L. Beauvois, *Traité de la servitude libérale. Analyse de la soumission*, Dunod, Paris 1994

sustained by reward if the subject does it and punishment if he does not do it), totalitarian (the reference to some higher Cause or common Good which is larger than the subject's perceived interest: 'You should do it because, even if it is unpleasant, it serves our Nation, Party, Humanity!'), and liberal (the reference to the subject's inner nature itself: 'What is asked of you may appear repulsive, but look deep into yourself and you will discover that it's in your true nature to do it, you will find it attractive, you will become aware of new, unexpected, dimensions of your personality!'). At this point, Beauvois should be corrected: a direct authoritarianism is practically non-existent — even the most oppressive regime publicly legitimises its reign with reference to some higher good, and the fact that, ultimately, 'you have to obey because I say so' reverberates only as its obscene supplement discernible between the lines. It is rather the specificity of the standard authoritarianism to refer to some higher good ('whatever your inclinations are, you have to follow my order for the sake of the higher good!'), while totalitarianism, like liberalism, interpolates the subject on behalf of HIS OWN good ('what may appear to you as an external pressure, is really the expression of your objective interests, of what you REALLY WANT without being aware of it!'). The difference between the two resides elsewhere: totalitarianism imposes on the subject his/her own good, even if it is against his/her will — recall King Charles's (in)famous statement: 'If any shall be so foolishly unnatural as to oppose their king, their country and their own good, we will make them happy, by God's blessing — even against their wills.' (Charles I to the Earl of Essex, 6 August 1644.) Here we already encounter the later Jacobin theme of happiness as a political factor, as well as the Saint-Justian idea of forcing people to be happy ... Liberalism tries to avoid (or, rather, cover up) this paradox by way of clinging to the end to the fiction of the subject's immediate free self-perception ('I don't claim to know better than you what you want — just look deep into yourself and decide freely what you want!').

The reason for this fault in Beauvois's line of argumentation is that he fails to recognise how the abyssal tautological authority ('It is so because I say so!' of the Master) does not work only because of the sanctions (punishment/reward) it implicitly or explicitly evokes. That is to say, what, effectively, makes a subject freely choose what is imposed on him against his interests and/or propensities? Here, the empirical inquiry into pathological (in the Kantian sense of the term) motivations is not sufficient: the enunciation of an injunction that imposes on its addressee a symbolic engagement/commitment evinces an inherent force of its own, so that what seduces us into obeying it is the very feature that may appear to be an obstacle — the absence of a 'why'. Here, Lacan can be of some help: the Lacanian 'Master-Signifier' designates precisely this hypnotic force of the symbolic injunction which relies only on its own act of enunciation — it is here that we encounter symbolic efficiency at its purest. The three ways of legitimising the exercise of authority (authoritarian, totalitarian, liberal) are nothing but the three ways to cover up, to blind us to the seductive power of, the abyss of this empty call. In a way, liberalism is the worst of the three, since it NATURALISES the reasons for obedience into the subject's internal psychological structure. So the paradox is that liberal subjects are in a way those least free: they change the very opinion/perception of themselves, accepting what was IMPOSED on them as originating in their nature — they are no longer even AWARE of their subordination.

Let us take the situation in the Eastern European countries around 1990, when the 'really existing socialism' was falling apart: all of a sudden, people were thrown into a situation of 'freedom of political choice' — however, were they REALLY at

any point asked the fundamental question of what kind of new order they actually wanted? Is it not that they found themselves in the exact situation of the subject-victim of a Beauvois experiment? They were first told that they were entering the promised land of political freedom; then, soon afterwards, they were informed that this freedom involves wild privatisation, the dismantling of social security, etc. etc. — they still have the freedom to choose, so if they want, they can step out; but, no, our heroic Eastern Europeans didn't want to disappoint their Western tutors, they stoically persisted in the choice they never made, convincing themselves that they should behave as mature subjects who are aware that freedom has its price ... This is why the notion of the psychological subject endowed with natural propensities, who has to realise his true self and its potential, and who is, consequently, ultimately responsible for his failure or success, is the key ingredient of the liberal freedom. And here one should risk reintroducing the Leninist opposition of formal and actual freedom: in an act of actual freedom, one dares precisely to BREAK this seductive power of the symbolic efficiency. Therein resides the moment of truth of Lenin's acerbic retort to his Menshevik critics: the truly free choice is a choice in which I do not merely choose between two or more options WITHIN a pre-given set of coordinates, but I choose to change this set of coordinates itself. The catch of the transition from the 'really existing socialism' to capitalism was that people never had the chance to choose the ad quem of this transition — all of a sudden, they were (almost literally) thrown into a new situation in which they were presented with a new set of given choices (pure liberalism, nationalist conservatism ...). What this means is that the actual freedom — the act of consciously changing this set — occurs only when, in the situation of a forced choice, one ACTS AS IF THE CHOICE IS NOT FORCED and chooses the impossible.

Did something homologous to the invention of the liberal psychological individual not take place in the Soviet Union in the late 1920s and early 1930s? The Russian avant-garde art of the early 1920s (futurism, constructivism) not only zealously endorsed industrialisation, it even endeavoured to reinvent a new industrial man — no longer the old man of sentimental passions and roots in tradition, but the new man who gladly accepted his role as a bolt or screw in the gigantic coordinated industrial machine. As such, it was subversive in its very ultra-orthodoxy, i.e. in its over-identification with the core of the official ideology: the image of man that we get in Eisenstein, Meyerhold, constructivist paintings, etc., emphasises the beauty of her or his mechanical movements, her or his thorough de-psychologisation. What was perceived in the West as the ultimate nightmare of liberal individualism, as the ideological counterpoint to 'Taylorisation', to the Fordist ribbon-work, was in Russia hailed as the utopian prospect of liberation: recall how Meyerhold violently asserted the behaviourist approach to acting — no longer emphatic familiarisation with the person the actor is playing, but the ruthless physical training aimed at the cold bodily discipline, at the ability of the actor to perform the series of mechanised movements ...⁵ THIS is what was unbearable in the official Stalinist ideology, so that Stalinist socialist realism WAS effectively an attempt to reassert 'socialism with a human face', i.e. to re-inscribe the process of industrialisation into the constraints of the traditional psychological individual: in the socialist realist texts, paintings and films, individuals are no longer rendered as parts of the global machine, but as warm passionate individuals.

The obvious reproach that imposes itself here, of course: is the basic characteristic of today's postmodern subject not the exact opposite of the free subject who experienced himself as ultimately responsible for his fate, namely the subject

5. See chapters 2 and 3 of S. Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West*, MIT Press, Cambridge 2000

who grounds the authority of his speech on his status of a victim of circumstances beyond his control? Every contact with another human being is experienced as a potential threat — if the other smokes, if he casts a covetous glance at me, he already hurts me; this logic of victimisation is today universalised, reaching well beyond the standard cases of sexual or racial harassment — recall the growing financial industry of paying damage claims: from the tobacco industry deal in the USA and the financial claims of the holocaust victims and forced laborers in Nazi Germany, to the idea that the USA should pay African Americans hundreds of billions of dollars for all they were deprived of due to their past slavery ... This notion of the subject as an irresponsible victim involves the extreme narcissistic perspective from which every encounter with the Other appears as a potential threat to the subject's precarious imaginary balance; as such, it is not the opposite, but, rather, the inherent supplement of the liberal free subject: in today's predominant form of individuality, the self-centred assertion of the psychological subject paradoxically overlaps with the perception of oneself as a victim of circumstances.

The case of Muslims as an ethnic, not merely religious, group in Bosnia is exemplary here: during the entire history of Yugoslavia, Bosnia was the place of potential tension and dispute, the locale in which the struggle between Serbs and Croats for the dominant role was fought. The problem was that the largest group in Bosnia were neither the Orthodox Serbs nor the Catholic Croats, but Muslims whose ethnic origins were always disputed — are they Serbs or Croats. (The role of Bosnia even left a trace in idiom: in all ex-Yugoslav nations, the expression 'So Bosnia is quiet!' was used in order to signal that any threat of a conflict was successfully defused.) In order to forestall this focus of potential (and actual) conflicts, in the 1960s the ruling communists imposed a miraculously simple invention: they proclaimed Muslims an autochthonous ETHNIC community, not just a religious group, so that Muslims were able to avoid the pressure to identify themselves either as Serbs or as Croats. What was in the beginning a pragmatic political artifice gradually caught on, Muslims effectively started to perceive themselves as a nation, systematically manufacturing their tradition, etc. However, even today, there remains an element of reflected choice in their identity: during the post-Yugoslav war in Bosnia, everyone was ultimately forced to CHOOSE her or his ethnic identity — when a militia stopped a person, asking him/her threateningly 'Are you a Serb or a Muslim?', the question did not refer to the inherited ethnic belonging, i.e. there was always in it an echo of 'Which side did you choose?' (for example, the movie director Emir Kusturica, coming from an ethnically mixed Muslim-Serb family, chose the Serb identity). Perhaps, the properly FRUSTRATING dimension of this choice is best rendered by the situation of having to choose a product in on-line shopping, where one has to make the almost endless series of choices: if you want it with x, press A, if not, press B ... The paradox is that what is totally excluded in these post-traditional reflexive societies, in which we are all the time bombarded with the urge to choose, in which even such 'natural' features as sexual orientation and ethnic identification are experienced as a matter of choice, is the basic, authentic, choice itself.

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The Post-Soviet Condition

Susan Buck-Morss

'Post-' and 'neo-': nothing so characterises our era as the proliferation of these terms. The Posts: postmodern, post-Marxist, post-colonial, post-national, post-hegemonic. There are post-patrimonial states in Africa, post-populist regimes in Latin America, and already post-globalisation. We are suffering from a kind of post-partum depression. Having long been pregnant with a future to which (to paraphrase Marx) the world has now given birth, we are, frankly, disappointed. 'Post-' is the position on the left, the moment of critical negation, while the neo-position forgets about the past and its disappointments, and with striking historical amnesia, attempts to bring the old up to date.

The neos: neo-liberal, neo-conservative, neo-imperial, neo-fundamentalist, neo-Nazi. They dismiss the wisdom that came from a critique of the original classical forms, and the history of popular movements that protested against them. Consider the neo-liberals: Trade union movements, social welfare legislation, social medicine, social security and other socialist and New Deal proposals are condemned as old-fashioned, whereas they were proposed precisely to compensate for the inadequacies of classical economic liberalism. This evocation of early bourgeois ideas is without historical consciousness or reverence for tradition. It is not conservative, not a return to the origin of these ideas, but radical and presentist, producing a radical right political agenda, and it is a global phenomenon.

The posts and the neos are not entirely unprecedented in the era of Western modernity. In the nineteenth century, architectural fashion was neo-Gothic and neoclassical; philosophy was neo-Kantian and neo-Hegelian. Here, too, the neos functioned as obfuscation, an ideological support of power, but in this case it was by a rejection of up-to-dateness and veiling of the present, hiding the current actualities of power behind nostalgic facades and neutralising any critical capacity that these cultural forms might originally have had.

In the mid-twentieth century, neo-Marxism and neo-Freudianism opposed orthodox Marxism and orthodox Freudianism in a context that had real political implications. At that time the neos were on the left not the right, and they indicated an optimism about political change, which was not just a mood but a real possibility, as there was a progressive political movement whose interests were expressed in neo-Marxism (socialism with a human face; Allende-style, elected socialism); and neo-Freudianism (critiques of the *social* origins of mental disorders). The New Left was therefore not a neo-Left, not an attempt to bring the Left 'up to date' by forgetting its recent past, but rather an attempt to keep it on the left precisely because of the recent past.

One has the sense that today, however, although progressive political movements exist, they are flourishing in spite of both the posts and the neos, not because of them. Theoretical debates between the posts and the neos are largely irrelevant to these movements. Although theorists may take inspiration from them (the Zapatistas, for example) the situation is not often reciprocated. This is our present situation. We as intellectuals may be on the Left, that is, the post-side of these debates, but we are not thereby automatically connected to the public debates. (We generally do not get good press.)

There is a notable difference between the posts and the neos with regard to their access to power. To consider the example of the US; the right wing of the Bush administration, policy-makers very much responsible for the offensive militarism that led to the Iraq disaster, are hard-core neo-conservatives (some taught by the University of Chicago's Leo Strauss), and neo-liberals had the upper hand in the Clinton administration. The Left that speaks the language of posts keeps a moment of critical negation alive despite its exclusion from power. But the fact that neither side is able to get beyond the present is symptomatic of our times.

Other theorists on the left would agree. Fredric Jameson has described postmodernism as a symptom of what he calls 'incomplete modernization.'¹ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri write that, 'postmodernist currents of thought... are the symptom of a rupture in the tradition of modern sovereignty';² they describe the new condition of 'empire' as itself 'postmodern', to be resisted by a 'counter-empire' of global social movements to whom they (refreshingly) address their comments.³ I will make a claim with which these theorists probably would not disagree, and yet I will draw conclusions for theory — both the theoretical understanding of our situation and the methodological implications for doing critical work — that they themselves have not suggested, and that pushes the debates in a somewhat different direction.

The claim is this (and it has direct relevance to the post-Soviet condition): the spread of Western scientific and cultural hegemony was the intellectual reality of the first five hundred years of globalisation, lasting from the beginning of European colonial expansion to the end of the Soviet modernising project (1492–1992). It will not remain hegemonic in the twenty-first century.

If the Soviet experiment is included as part of the era of Western hegemony, then this term is not specific to (late-)capitalism as a mode of production. *Dreamworld and Catastrophe* argues precisely that the Cold War was internal to Western hegemony, not outside of it.⁴ This position in fact converges with the perception of politicised Islam, which also classifies the USSR as part of the West. But for Islamist thinkers what is important is the materialism and atheism that characterises both, while from a critique internal to the West, it is quite the contrary, the quasi-religious faith that both Cold War enemies had in history as the time of human progress, the elimination of scarcity through heavy-industrial development that was to deliver happiness to the masses. Evidence of the end of a the Western era has to do more with the ecological disasters brought about by this blind faith in industrial progress than the spiritual impoverishment that so disturbed thinkers like Sayyid Qutb, theorist of the Muslim Brotherhood — although Qutb's critique of the Western reason can be fruitfully compared with that made by Adorno and Horkheimer in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.⁵

Ours is not merely a post-Eurocentric, nor even a post-Western age. Rather it is an era when Europe and the West will cease to be the reference point beyond which theorists need to position themselves as post- or neo-. It might be argued that I betray my own US-centrism here and that only the United States will cease to be the point of

1. F. Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present*, Verso, London 2002, p.141

2. M. Hardt, A. Negri, *Empire*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2000, p.143

3. *Ibid.*, p.138

4. 'It is crucial to recognize that the end of the Soviet era was not limited specifically to the territory of the Soviet Union. The Bolshevik experiment, no matter how many specifically Russian cultural traits it developed, was vitally attached to the Western modernizing project, from which it cannot be extricated without causing the project itself to fall to pieces — including its cult of historical progress.' S. Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West*, MIT Press, Cambridge 2000, p.68

5. See S. Buck-Morss, *Thinking Past Terror: Islamism and Critical Theory on the Left*, Verso, London 2004, pp.98-9

reference — that the European Union, perhaps someday including Russia, will become the global model, a new Western way — or that even Bush's American model of militarily imposed democracy will prevail. I do not think so. The contradictions of the present hegemony are too blatant even on the level of discourse (not to speak of the fundamental structural contradiction between trans-national global markets and Westphalian-based nation states). George W. Bush proclaims: 'freedom is on the march', John Kerry 'reports for duty' as his party's presidential nominee, and yet neither politician questions the obvious, that the militarist metaphors they employ — and the military force they deploy — contradict the very concepts of freedom and democratic politics in which they are allegedly engaged. Bush's pre-emptive war doctrine is a symptom of US weakness, not its strength. Europe is caught 'between anti-Semitism and Islamophobia,' (Matti Bunzl's phrase) as the economic goals of the EU are out of synchronisation with the politically resistant ideas of sovereignty and national belonging. In the post-Soviet Union, the political and civil democracy that existed in a very authentic sense in the late glasnost years of communist rule has long ago passed its high point and gone into steady decline.

The bankruptcy of Western hegemony may soon be matched literally by economic bankruptcy in at least parts of the West (the US, with its debt and military spending, is arguably moving in this direction). Whether this decline will mark the end of capitalism is a big question, but perhaps the wrong question, because the whole Western construction of capitalism, both as a concept and a reality, is itself threatened with bankruptcy, to be replaced — by what? I do not think we can know, because our very conceptual frames for knowing are being drawn into the melting-down process, drawn into the debris, and may become part of the ruins of Western discourse.

Attempts to describe the present transformation are bound to fail. The terms of description are themselves undergoing a transformation, and it is necessary from a left point of view that this be not merely allowed, but encouraged. Rigidity of the discourse of critical theory must be avoided at all costs. Nor can any mode of comprehension be excluded out of hand, be it scientific, humanist, aesthetic, or (importantly) religious. Our era demands a radical creativity of thinking in all of these forms.

At the same time, the past is not superseded. As 'late' as capitalism may be, it still has some life in it, and the still-identifiable tendencies and mutations of its structure must receive the closest analysis. As for socialism, we have not heard the last of it. Socialism will be back in some new form as a creative idea, not because of any logic of history, but because material conditions will demand its rediscovery. It will have to be re-imagined as a response to materially existing conditions, because the growing gap between rich and poor, the deep contradiction between public and private interest, the ecological disasters of the present forms of production and consumption will not automatically disappear as a result of the end of Western dominance. These unacceptable consequences of what we have up till now call capitalism (the term was defined by Werner Sombart in the early twentieth century; Marx himself only rarely used the word) do not seem to be qualitatively lacking in, say, the still-communist Republic of China, or in India with its so-called 'alternative' modernity, or in the revolutionary Republic of Iran, where Muslim economics is supposed to be replacing the Western capitalist form. In all of these places, no matter what name is given to the economic system, we find the same tendencies: an obscene divide between rich and poor, privatisation of the public sphere, ecological ruin, the entrenchment of oligarchy, and vulnerability of imperilled workers to the unregulated contingencies of global markets.

From a left perspective, the importance of the distinction between two tasks, the critique of the global economy and the critique of *how* we critique it cannot be overestimated. While it may still be necessary to describe the present economic situation in terms of tendencies in the mode of production (that is, by locating changes in both productive forces and productive relations) concepts like surplus value, scarcity, real value, work, social costs, reproduction, the division of labour particularly the sexual division of labour, economic development, class and the struggle — are all in need of reconsideration and redefinition — precisely because the mode of production is undergoing so fundamental a change that the process presently escapes our language to describe it. The transformation is presently sensed on the skin and in the small shifts in the routines and habits of daily life. We describe it only in symptoms, perceived like a faint shifting of tectonic plates that is slow, indeterminate, and so profound that it transforms the meaning of its terms. If this inadequacy of explanatory power is true of the language of critical, Marxist economics, it is even more true of the language of liberal, hegemonic economics, the abstract models of which exclude the referential world, the real, material world of human bodies and nature that appear in the discourse of neo-liberal economists as ‘externalities,’ bracketed out of any claims to truth generated by these models.

If I speak of the end of the era of Western hegemony that has lasted from 1492–1992, this is not just a description of time but also a construction, a narrative of history. As Jameson writes: ‘We cannot *not* periodize.’⁶ Here, then, is my periodisation. Our era marks a slow but decisive rupture in planetary history, the end of Western hegemony whose term modernity is, and with it, the end of capitalism as the West has formulated it, that is, as a stage in history that belongs to its own, exclusive trajectory of development. It will be experienced as the end of a stage in the collective imagination, before it will be a rupture of reality. We are not going to get out of the present predicament without a total rethinking of what capitalism is, and what idea of history it drags along with it. But not only this, the culture of critical theory will also have to change. Not that ‘Westerners’ cannot do critical theory (or that it should be replaced by other posts — Latin American post-continental theory for example, or post-modern Islamism) but that in the next phase of theory, all of us will need to recognise and learn from hitherto unacknowledged traditions of cultural experience. As a consequence, the intellectual oligarchy of Paris, Frankfurt, Moscow, Mumbai, Beijing, Tokyo, London, and elsewhere, and will need to question the hierarchical cosmopolitanism of the metropolises, and engage traditions and innovations that bypass these centres, linking thinkers from Peru, Iran, Serbia, Tanzania, Senegal, Ukraine, Turkey, Brazil, Cuba, Mexico, Tunisia, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Korea, Thailand, Uruguay, etc., etc., etc. The theoretical task facing a new, Global Left calls for a collective effort. No one book, no one discipline or school, no one cultural renaissance or national academy will provide it single-handedly, but the task can be engaged in at any of these sites. Rather than intellectual centres, the pre-eminence of which provide a series of new intellectual fashions, there will be a constant need for translation across differences in discursive contexts, not only those of language and culture — translations that, as Walter Benjamin wrote, change *both* contexts rather than a theory being passed down from the centre to the periphery in imperial fashion.

So, one of the characteristics of the new hegemony, is that it is not the accomplishment of an intellectual élite, or an avant-garde class, or an ‘advanced’ society or culture that knows, or thinks it knows beforehand where we are heading. The theories that will count are the ones that resonate as meaningful within social and political movements globally, because they can make out the lines, the forms,

6. F. Jameson, *op. cit.*, p. 29

within these theories of their own, practical aspirations. What is called for is an exact inverse of the Marxist global discourse, which was a universal discourse differently articulated. The new Global Left will consist of specific, particular discourses universally articulated.

A vision that can lay claim to hegemonic acceptance must express the universal interests of humanity. This Marxist insight has not been superseded. The Enlightenment, the French Revolution, the Haitian Revolution, the Bolshevik Revolution, the Chinese Revolution, all received their legitimacy by this claim to represent universal humanity. It could be argued that the Iranian Revolution is the last great revolution in this western mode — complete with a reign of virtue and revolutionary terror (in fact, the Ayatolla Khoumeini was in exile in France just before the 1979 revolution broke out in his home country). The Iranian Revolution (which Foucault at first championed with enthusiasm) was not a case of this Middle Eastern country 'catching up' with the West. Rather, it marks the end of a certain Western political ideal: founding the new state through revolutionary overthrow and terror. (George W. Bush's Iraq policy of 'regime change' achieved through *state* terror is a caricature of this model, which survives today in this perverse and debased form. The rationalisation of Rumsfeld, 'democracy is messy', is a neo-imperialist variant of Lenin's metaphor: 'you can't make an omelette without breaking eggs.') However much we may feel nostalgia for its narratives of collective heroism, the revolutionary ideal of founding a republic through violent rupture is so bloodstained, its terror is so terrifying to actually live through, its masculine warrior culture is so dismissive of the interests of women and children (and in fact all human, animal, and natural life) that we must be content to see it go.

So we come, finally, to the title of this essay. If I speak of the 'post-Soviet condition', it is to say that 'post-Soviet' refers to an ontology of time, not an ontology of the collective. Post-Soviet is a half way condition, where we have recognised the inadequacies of modernity, but are still too insecure to leave them behind. The post-Soviet condition does not describe as a curio the specimens who presently inhabit the former Soviet Union, to define 'their' situation or their culture as unique. This is not about 'failed modernity', or collective cultural difference based on linguistic specificity. Rather: we are all post-Soviet. We are to understand this situation as our own.

Again, to be clear, post-Soviet does not imply a universal global culture here, but rather a universal historical condition, one that does and should call for an infinite variety and democratic interaction of response. It is the condition, the historical moment, which is shared. A political definition of that elusive term 'globalisation' is suggested here, as well as the bare bones, the thin definition, of a new collective subjectivity.

We, the 'we' who have nothing more — nor less — in common than sharing *this* time: this is the universal condition to which I refer.

Globalisation, described as a spatial situation, is not new, as it has been a precise trend of the era of Western hegemony that is coming to a close. But if we give primacy to time (and perhaps all progressive politics gives primacy to time over space), then globalisation refers to the newness of this shared time: there is no part of global space that is 'advanced' in time; none that is 'backward'; we are all in *this* time that is both transient and universal; we share the same contingent history.

One takes one's position in relation to this new situation — so far under the shadow of the reign of the neos and the posts. But if we stop here, stuck in the post-period, or in a return without memory to a neo-version of the past, then we miss the opportunity that the shared time of a global present can provide. The process might

be described as what Helen Petrovsky calls a 'human community (or collective) in the making' as a process within the 'transient social present', where we meet 'in the absence of all traditional definitions', working, collectively, through a juxtaposition of different work, and recognising our commonality through, again to cite Petrovsky, 'the shock of non-similar similarity.'⁷ One is reminded of Walter Benjamin's non-sensuous similarities — and this suggests a new mimetic skill — an ability to see likeness in difference, the likeness that emerges when images are juxtaposed and yet still *opposed*, perhaps even a third meaning such as Eisenstein suggests in his theory of cinematic montage — sensing that our common ground is to be found less in the convergence of these images than in the unbridgeable space that holds them apart (the third meaning is not a dialectical synthesis that nails meaning down, not a *point de caption* (Lacan) or master signifier, but a space of freedom, of creative cultural production that keeps meaning on the move).

Such an alternative, a surpassing of the posts and the neos, that does not prejudge the form and shape of what is to come — does not name it by its old name, the proletariat, nor even with the new name of the multitude, as this name is already deeply rooted in the particularity of one tradition, that is Christianity (and has little generative, mimetic power within, say, the Islamic tradition of critical theory). Let us allow this new community to remain unnamed, but work collectively yet separately, to meet in the unclaimed semantic space in order to make the new community happen. That is what might be hoped for from a new, Global Left that finds itself in a 'post-Soviet condition'.

Unfolding Geographies

Erden Kosova

Academic investigations into the concept of Balkanism have coincided with the recent interest of core-European art institutions in the contemporary art practice of the Balkans. This is the last in a chain of geographic framings that referred to the eastern wing of Europe as an unsurprising side effect of the expansion of the European Union eastwards. While contributing to the ongoing deconstruction of the historical development of the Western gaze, these studies also hinted at the ways in which Balkanist ideology was employed in the region to brand some neighbouring cultures or lower classes as inferior, and subsequently claiming a superior (national or class-based) character. Another form of the Balkanist ideology seems to me to have surfaced as a temporal and strategic identity construct, as a means of self-empowerment, of attracting the attention of the privileged Other.

While criticising the naïve postulation that the Balkans is a cultural synthesis composed by an exemplary course of hybridisation, Suzana Milevska proposes the concept of 'neither' in order to underline the varying cultural formations, elements, and the antagonisms between them that set up the rich heterogeneity of the region.¹ Yet, the same character of being 'neither' can be applied to other geographies that have been branded by the foolish clichés of the Euro-centrics as 'the bridge between continents', 'the cradle of civilisations', 'the Paris of the East' and so on. Without doubt, the term 'neither' doesn't designate a geographic localism or regionalism that might lead to essentialist calls for partition and unity, but it evokes the possibility of a smooth surface that would allow us to denaturalise borders, connect regions, join the ongoing conversations and journeys between them and open up new routes and cartographies instead of reproducing some old maps.

In 1998, Gülsün Karamustafa, one of the forerunners of the contemporary art scene built up in Istanbul in the last two decades, came up with a work that was based on an illustration from the sixteenth century. The image she employed in her *Presentation of An Early Representation* was borrowed from a chronicle commissioned for the court of a German principality, and it depicted a group of Ottoman slave dealers inspecting some newly acquired, enslaved women. The group of well-dressed women on the left, who were apparently of European decent, were strongly contrasted with the silhouette-like figure of the naked black woman on the opposite side. For Karamustafa, the rhetorical demonisation of the dealers here and the contemptuous oversimplification of the black figure were both indicators of the Eurocentric gaze representing its Others through a prism of ideological deformation, and anticipating the classic imagery of the nineteenth century. During a presentation held in Istanbul at that time, the correlation Karamustafa had proposed was found problematic. According to the critical perspective raised by the audience, the depiction of the

1. From Milevska's presentation at the seminar 'South... East... Europe... Mediterranean' organised by Platform Garanti Contemporary Art Centre in Istanbul, 14-16 December 2003

Ottoman men was rather an accurate reflection of the period, which posited the expanding Ottoman forces of the time as the 'absolute Other' threatening the potency of the male European self and the existence of Christianity on the continent.

While reading Edward Said's book *Orientalism* years ago, through the eyes of a fresh-minded BA student, I recall my impatience to relate Said's articulate account to my own knowledge of history, which had naturally been formed by the perspective of Ottoman-Turkish historiography. My expectations when immersing myself into the text as a reader were constantly let down — I even felt somewhat excluded. I could not understand how there could be such scarce mention of the Ottomans when they were perhaps the fundamental element in forming the word 'Orient'; so few references to the Ottoman State system, which still maintained some authority over Middle Eastern geography throughout the nineteenth century that Said focused on. He was too Arab-centric perhaps — or could it be that he was looking only at geographies colonised by the European forces? The word 'colonised' had to be the answer.²

The strands within the Turkish intelligentsia that are associated with Anglo-American academia have examined the ways to incorporate the wide range of achievements of post-colonial studies to the Turkish specificity. One motivation for this endeavour was about how to articulate a critical approach to developments around the current negotiations for EU membership and how to articulate a position that would be empathetic to the non-Western world. What remained problematic was that this hasty levelling between Turkey and the surrounding geographies that experienced a direct colonisation by the imperialist powers of Europe in the past could easily hide the fact that Turkey had inherited the experience of being a colonial power and not being a colonised geography. This careless slip has recently had serious complications in managing a rapprochement with the forgotten memories of the Ottoman imperial past — the Armenian tragedy of 1915 in particular. A further danger of this problematic anamnesis, which binds contemporary Turkey to the Third World in the absence of an experience of colonisation, is about drawing too close to the leftist versions of nationalism. These hint at the historical synchrony between the Leninist and Kemalist revolutions, thereby assuming a common denominator of anti-imperialism in them, and transposing this ideological deduction to the current affairs by projecting a Euro-Asian pact against the EU. In the worst case this might mean dreams of a Pan-Turkic alter-empire stretching towards the eastern limits of Central Asia. The strategy of appropriating the role of the victim might easily slip into the reactionary and essentialist forms of self-empowerment.

After *Presentation of an Early Representation*, Gülsün Karamustafa produced other works that related to the iconography of classic Orientalism. Yet, being cautious about the possibility of claims of sensitivity for the subaltern, she didn't persist on the political positioning of the initial piece. On the contrary, she re-appropriated the paintings produced by the nineteenth century male European gaze using techniques of decomposition and multiplication. She also pursued a strategy of personal distancing from and disidentification with the depicted Istanbul women of the time, underlining the sheer fantastical character of the paintings (since the colonial power could not reach the capital of the falling empire and penetrate the harems of the city) and played with the aristocratic nature attributed to the women of the Polis (upper class citizens of Istanbul being served by female servants from other geographies). Here the apparent twist of complicity with the master gaze, paradoxically produced an open field for manoeuvre and flexibility in identifying with historical ruptures and continuities — being Ottoman, Istanbulu, Turkish, communist dissenter, figurative painter, conceptual artist, mother and more singularities yet to come.

2. The prioritised status attributed by the European intelligentsia to the Ottomans as the holder of power within the Orient is well analysed in these two works: T. Hentch, *L'Orient Imaginaire, La Vision Politique Occidentale de l'est Méditerranéen*, Les Editions de Minuit, Paris 1988, and A. Grosrichard, *The Sultan's Court, European Fantasies of the East*, Verso, London 1998

There is another reason behind this introduction. The people that have made the discursive field of contemporary art in Turkey have experienced a certain heartbreak in relation to the *East Art Map* project. It is clear from the explanations of the project that the word East here signifies the eastern wing of what the maps conceive as the continent of Europe that had experienced the administration of varying forms of state socialism. And it is obvious that during that time, the post-War period, Turkey belonged to another political climate that oscillated between capitalistic democracies and military interventions, a fault line that ran along the northern coasts of the Mediterranean. Yet, it is also clear, I presume, that the word 'East' actually designates nothing (no place and no culture), it is arbitrary to the extent that it can be fictionalised and made flexible to frame any non-Western territory. The list of artists enlisted in the *East Art Map*, kept exclusively to a group of ex-socialist nation-states, is composed of people who have frequently collaborated with figures from the country of Turkey for more than fifteen years. This has happened not only within the context of ambitious representational exhibitions organised by core-European art institutions but also through a series of recent projects that managed a serious level of transversality and conversation. So, the outsider position wonders — why this particular and somewhat outdated, exclusivism right now? Instead of dealing with the over-elaborated rupture experienced with the fall of the Soviet Union, could we not simply move to reflect upon the next, fresh and approaching trauma, discuss the social dynamics of the present and future and experiment on alternative mappings? History is not given — please help to construct it! Yet, it has already been constructed for a while, perhaps there is a need to recognise this and push history forward. Of course it might be that my perspective has been shaped by a context that doesn't have the luxury of designing a therapeutic procedure of abreactions, a context that is addicted to constant and unfurling crises.

After two exhibitions that anachronistically claimed a universal and internationalist character, the third Istanbul Biennial in 1992 took the risk of positing the event onto its own geography and postulating a regional ground. The motivations of Vasif Kortun, the curator of the show, in inviting artists and curators from neighbouring countries, particularly from Bulgaria, Romania, Poland, Ukraine and Russia was about facilitating the articulation of an alternative political stance within the local (and socialist) intellectual environment paralysed after the collapse of the Socialist bloc, to ruminate on the social energies that had been released in the Balkans, the Black Sea circle, and Caucasus, and speculate about the consequences

Gülsün Karamustafa
Presentation of an Early Representation
 1996

Hale Tenger
Decent Deathwatch: Bosnia Herzegovinia
 1993



of this emerging flux on the city of Istanbul which had set out to become a metropolitan hub within the region. The third biennial also set out to differentiate the local contemporary art practices from the hegemony of provincial modernism. The occasion to meet artists from neighbouring countries who shared similar artistic concerns, economic limitations, criticism towards paternalistic state power, ironic or humorous attitudes, willingness to integrate into the global flux persuaded artists from Istanbul to claim a regional belonging that was liberating from the stifling autism of the local. These openings — the individuation of contemporary art practice and the conversation within countries and regions — were also reinforced in the following biennial curated by René Block in 1995.

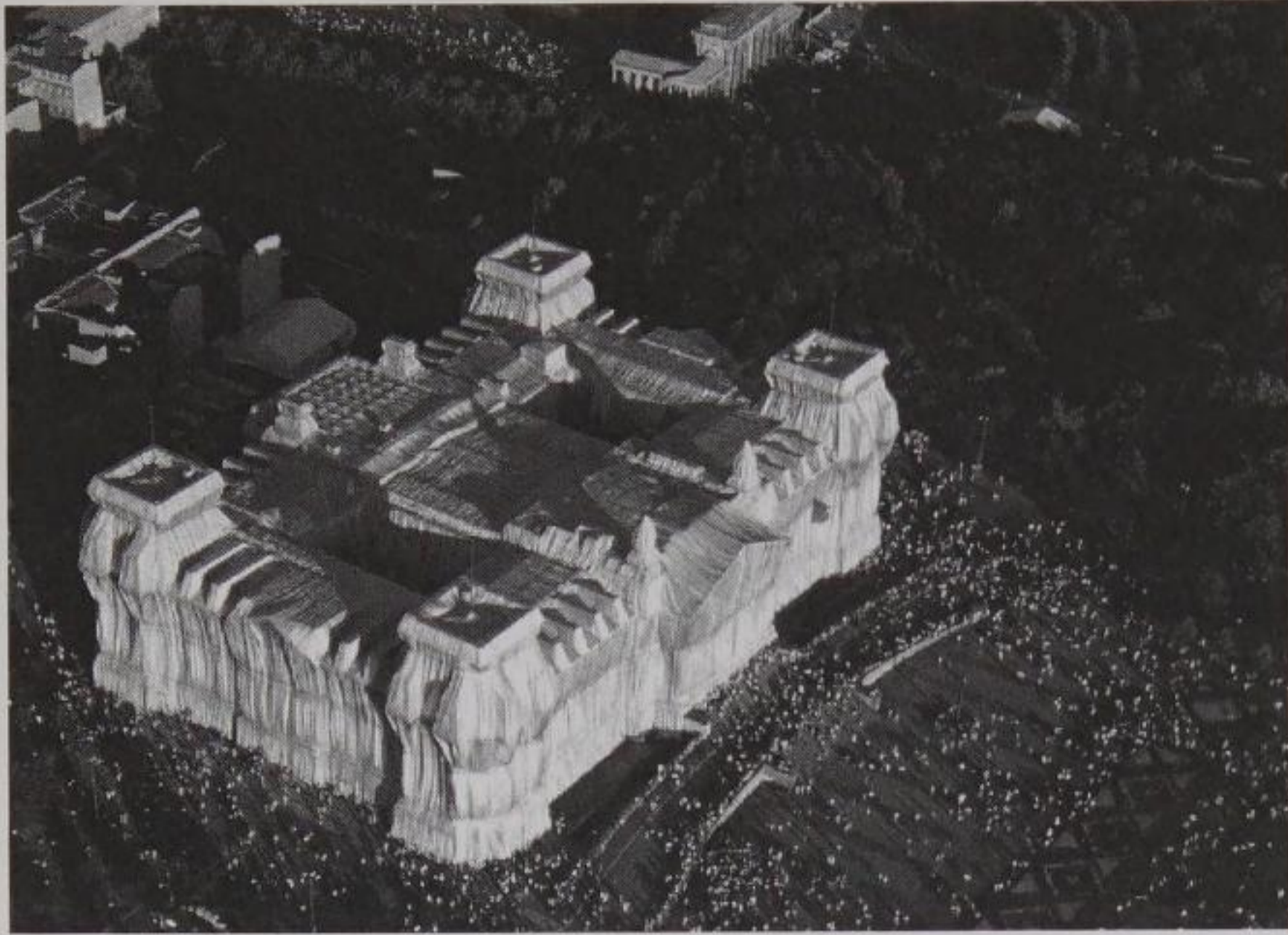
The extension of the geographic perspective also had an effect on the content of the works — for example in the works of Hale Tenger, who had produced strongly critical installations that had operated as national allegories (such as *The School of Sikiinden Aşsa Kasımpaşa* 1990, *Down Up* 1992, and *I Know People Like These II* 1992 — the latter was exhibited in the third biennial and afterwards the artist was sued for insulting the Turkish flag), groundbreaking works that initiated a process of politicisation in the Istanbul art scene. In her work *Decent Deathwatch: Bosnia-Herzegovina* 1993, Tenger again constructed an atmospheric environment linked to a tense political agenda. The installation was composed of hundreds of glass jars containing press clippings and stills from TV programmes about the tragedy in Bosnia and an edited sound composition playing extracts from interviews the artist did with Bosnian refugees who were hosted in camps in Turkish Thrace.

If Tenger's step towards commenting about a conflict that shook the world at that time was an indication of the strengthening self-confidence of artists in Istanbul to talk about events on the regional and global scale,³ it was also exemplifying the historical undercurrents that bind Turkish society to the Balkans. The political maps of twentieth century nation-states have had a visual and cognitive impact of naturalising the current borders and linking them to the corresponding ethnicities. Yet, even a hundred years later, people of later generations maintain a shady belonging to the territories left by their ancestors as a consequence of mutual population exchanges, mass immigrations, and other conditions of diaspora. The loss of the Balkan territory, in which the whole modernist project of the late Ottomans was fully operated, and which accommodated the intellectual élite of the empire, and the following immigration of millions of people to Anatolia created serious traumas with social consequences still to be felt. During the Republican era people of Rumelian descent became integrated into more liberal and modern segments of society,⁴ and the traces of this invisible and unspoken social continuity can also be seen within the contemporary art field. For example, Gülsün Karamustafa's double screen video work *The Settler* 2003, comments on the tragedies of the nationalist wars and the resulting mutual emigrations at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Karamustafa has also dealt with current issues related to the region. In *Mystic Transport*, her piece in the third Istanbul Biennial, she designed wheeled metal bins that could be freely moved on the ground of the exhibition space by the audience. The mobility of the bins and the colourful duvets placed in them were meant to function as visual metaphors of social displacement. The subject of inner migration from eastern provinces to the developed cities in the west of the country on a massive scale and the consequent cultural and political implications of this phenomenon have been intensively analysed by socialist intellectuals from the 1980s onwards. The shift of focus from the classic category of the proletariat to the newcomers to the big cities within the visual arts was most clearly exemplified in the works of

3. A video installation by her, from a later date, *Cross Section* 1996 gives an idea about the widening range of her political scope. In the piece, composed of two video projections screened on two sides of the same screen Tenger is shown from back and front. She tells of the difficulties she experienced during the procedures for getting a visa for Fortress Europe, and how she, as an artist and someone from the upper middle class, was relatively privileged in these procedures in comparison with someone from Turkey's lower classes. One of Tenger's recollections in relation to *Decent Deathwatch: Bosnia-Herzegovina* is worth quoting here. She recalls, '...the strangest, and most unexpected reaction came from a West European lady in the Helsinki Citizen's Assembly. The moment she realised what the subject of the work was, she asked me sharply why it wasn't the Kurds, and stormed out without waiting for the answer.' *Mission Impossible* 1990-6, *Interview with Hale Tenger by Vasif Kortun*, Galeri Nev, Istanbul 1997

4. Also several conspiracy theories have been produced against them by different ideologies. The ultra-nationalist movement of the 1930s put the people of Rumelia in the category of prime suspects for betrayal. Recently some paranoid 'national leftists' detected a hegemonic caste composed of a group of people who had some ancestors who were Jewish converts immigrated from Thessalonica.



Serkan Özkaya
Wrapped Reichstag
(inspired by Christo)
 1997

Hüseyin Alptekin
Hostipitality: Hotel Europe
 2005

Karamustafa. Yet, in *Mystic Transport* the geography of displacement strategically remained unspecified in order to take account of the emerging mobility between the ex-socialist terrain and Turkey. The two most visible social occurrences of these new movements, small-scale commerce of the lower classes, popularly named as 'luggage trade,' and the prostitution traffic, were combined in her later project, *Objects of Desire, 100 Dollar Limit* 1998 – 2001. The performance-based work was based on buying cheap goods from the street markets of Istanbul, for a symbolic amount of 100 US dollars, the usual fee charged by a foreign prostitute working in Turkey, carrying these goods in basic plastic luggage to some West European countries and selling them at the openings of the exhibitions to which she was invited. Another observable occurrence of circulation within the urban space of the region were the children coming from Romania and Moldavia, mostly accompanied by their parents, to play music on the streets of Istanbul for money. The poignant stories of these children who had to leave Turkey after three months of permitted residence, only to be replaced by others, was recorded in *The Stairs* 2001, another work by Karamustafa.

An affirmative take on the accelerated energies between neighbouring countries can be found in the works of Hüseyin Alptekin. In a series of photographs brought together under the title *Capacity* 1998, Alptekin presented an alternative mapping of Istanbul, a collection of street plates from hotels that were named after other cities. Some of them had such names as *Paris, Viyana, Milano, Amsterdam*, names that attempt to appropriate some glamour from wealthy Europe. Others like *Berlin, Wiesbaden, Sydney, Canada*, were presumably linked to the personal life stories of the hotel owners, some past experience as Gastarbeiters. Some other city names on the panels like *Sarajevo, Zagreb, Bakü* reflected Istanbul's attachment to neighbouring countries and the existing network of small businesses. In extreme cases, extravagant names such as *Rio, Tibet, Tanca, Copacabana*, revealed fantasies of the owners, who had, most probably, never visited these cities. The word 'capacity' was inscribed onto the rectangular arrangement of photographs using cheap and kitsch neon bulbs hinting at the actual and potential transversalities hosted in the growing city of Istanbul.

The integration of the Turkish economy into the global circulation of capital in the last two decades, and the following economic and structural expansion of

Istanbul has led the city to claim back its historic centrality within its surroundings. The reassessment of history has brought hidden or forgotten mythologies to the surface. *Sea Elephant Travel Agency*, a project initiated by Alptekin, utilised one of the old fictions about the city — Jules Verne's relatively neglected novel of *Keraban the Stubborn*. The main protagonist of the story, Keraban, is a tobacco merchant based in Istanbul. His agent Van Mitten arrives in the city from Rotterdam for a short visit. As a gesture of generosity, Keraban invites him to a dinner in a prestigious restaurant in Üsküdar, a district on the Asiatic coastline of the Bosphorus. When they reach the seaside they find out that the Sultan has recently issued a tax for crossing the sea by boat. Although it is a negligible amount Keraban makes a big fuss and refuses to pay. Still eager to keep his promise he comes up with a solution: to travel along the Black Sea coast to get to Üsküdar. The rest of the novel narrates their adventurous journey. *Sea Elephant Travel Agency* set out to restage this journey by organising a boat trip following the same route, travelling to the port cities of Varna, Constanta, Odessa, Sevastapol, Yalta, Rostov, Novosibirsk, Sochi and Batum, and circulating the people on board who came from varying disciplines such as art, literature, science, history and so on. The concept of this utopian project, which was complicated to organise, was later hijacked by an art institution that managed to secure larger resources. Nevertheless, I presume the personality of Alptekin, his own journeys around the region and other countries, the relationships he built, the networks he facilitated, the mythologies he conjured up has produced as much, if not more affect, as a project with a large budget.

The younger generation of artists have shared the interest of their forerunners in keeping contact with artists from the ex-socialist topography. They needed other practices for comparison and inspiration, to have proof of the validity of their own practices; and they connected with the works of people of similar age, status and habitat. An exceptional case, in this sense, was the understanding, or *andersverstehen*, of the work of Alexander Brener — he was taken rather as a father figure or a model. The first reference to him appeared in a project by Serkan Özkaya, whose works at that time were based on ironic repetitions of renowned performances. He submitted, for example, a proposal to the Berlin Senate to cover the Reichstag with a sheet as an artwork. Similar to this humorous enactment of the 'art fool', pretending to be ignorant of Christo's famous performance, Özkaya sent a proposal to the administration of MOMA, asking permission to spray a dollar sign on Mondrian's *Broadway Boogie Woogie*, which was in the collection of the museum. This was a proposed restaging of the famous action by Brener on a Malevich painting in the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam in 1997. Naturally, he received a harsh, chastising reply from MOMA telling him to adopt inspirational models other than Brener. Later, Özkaya realised the project on a replica of the Mondrian painting. This wasn't the end of the project.

Around that time, Esat Tekand, a relatively established painter from the earlier generation, was painting well-known performances, actions and happenings of the neo-avantgarde from the 1970s. His cynical gesture was based on a fatalistic reading of Postmodernism and his pessimist conclusion about the impossibility of creating something new in art. Serkan Özkaya and Halil Altındere, an artist friend of his, visited Tekand's second solo exhibition based on the same concept. Altındere pulled out a tin of spray paint and sprayed a dollar sign on Tekand's painting that had transposed the photograph of the famous Joseph Beuys performance of *I Like America and America Likes Me* onto canvas. Not surprisingly a scandal broke out, Altındere was brought to court, and the contemporary art field was divided into two camps.



Ahmet Ögüt
excerpt from *Colouring Book*
2004

Halil Altındere
Spraying a dollar sign on
Esat Tekand's I Like America
and America Likes Me
illustration by Serkan
Özkaya, 1998

Altındere's sympathisers thought this act might signal the approach of a daring attitude contrasting with the tameness that governed the local artistic field. Modern artists in Turkey had long been employed as public servants — their task was to facilitate and visualise the country's (ultra-)modernisation project, enlighten the people, and integrate the newly built nation. From the 1960s onwards a certain autonomy was achieved and in the 1970s two different personae appeared in modern arts: the first was the bohemian, expressionist artist who had a certain critical stance towards politics yet was fully integrated into the Turkish art market; the second one was the courageous artist of the socialist realist creed, taking a position in the ongoing class war yet to a certain extent instrumentalising her or his artistic practice. A truly avant-garde stance, critical of hegemonic ideologies, political in an autonomous and anarchistic sense, experimental in the visual and formal qualities of their practice, and resistant to capitalism's tools of recuperating artworks as consumable objects had never existed in Turkey. Perhaps this was the time... On the other hand, those who were irritated by Altındere's act, argued that it was merely a straightforward case of vandalism marked by a false claim of heroism that echoed the YBA generation.

Altındere and those that stood with him, including myself, launched a magazine to defend the act. The first issue of *art-ist* (June 1999) included a special dossier on Brener's spraying act on the Malevich painting, and texts on a series of relatively established artists such as Oleg Kulik, Andres Serrano, Orlan and Stelarc, all of whom had provoked the art world in some way or another. Despite all financial obstacles, fluctuating performances and internal conflicts *art-ist* has managed to survive as the only independent contemporary art magazine from Turkey. The synergy of the 1998–9 season has understandably receded with time, but the affiliation with Alexander Brener remains constant. He and Barbara Schurz edited the ninth issue of the magazine published in November 2004, in which their negation of the field of art was radicalised with a call for an insurgent anarchism. After that everyone had to take their own route: Brener and Schurz unsurprisingly described the Istanbul art scene as a corrupted environment filled with a bunch of 'fucking collaborators' and yet, *art-ist* had to return to the sphere of contemporary art.

Serkan Özkaya's interest in Brener and other artists from the ex-socialist countries was based on his sympathy for developing ideas with extremely limited resources and keeping the physical end products in a negligible status in comparison with the idea at the outset. His video *Demolish Serious Culture* 2000, was an

interview with Brener and Schurz recorded just after their intervention into the press conference for *Manifesta 3* in Ljubljana. This irony of Özkaya's strategy of remaining as a parasite on the creations of other artists sometimes resulted in a cynical position, as exemplified in his photograph entitled *Russian Avantgarde: Fuck Your Cat 2000*, in which he posed naked running after his cat at home.

In that context Halil Altındere's sympathy related to the ways that a set of intellectual people in neighbouring countries, living in humble circumstances in comparison with the Western standards, were managing to mock the social and artistic hierarchies in between. Simple tricks, one-shot joke effects that aim to displace the conventions of politics and arts have been characteristics of his practice. And through the influence of *art-ist* magazine under his direction, and important exhibitions he curated such as *I am Too Sad to Kill You* (2003) he has left a mark on emerging artists from different cities, most remarkably the ones living in Diyarbakır.

The city of Diyarbakır, a cosmopolitan city in the past, in the last decade became a place of refuge for Kurdish people traumatised by the civil war between the Turkish army and the separatist guerrilla army, the PKK. The drastic rise in population following mass migration from the surrounding provinces in the South East Anatolia created a vibrant environment of social energy. In the midst of political pressure and deep economic poverty a group of young artists: Şener Özmen, Erkan Özgen, Cengiz Tekin and Ahmet Ögüt saw the potential emancipation of expression in the field of contemporary art and set out to produce works with the most minimal resources — first narrations inscribed on notebooks, or caricature-like drawings, then video works, one of the most economically efficient media of recent years. Halil Altındere, originating from a town nearby, remained their role model.

Some resonances of the aesthetics of the Diyarbakır art scene can also be found in art practice in Kosova. The works of Sokol Beqiri, Erzen Shkololli and Mehmet Behluli were immediate responses to the trauma of 1999, but the following generation of artists including Albert Heta, Jakup Ferri, Driton Hajredini, Lulzim Zeqiri, Dren Maliqi and Alban Muja reached artistic maturity in a post-traumatic environment that was already involved in a process of normalisation. A state of living in a nation-in-process and under the suddenly emerging gaze of the European art intelligentsia, were the two common conditions shared by the Kosova and Diyarbakır art scenes. The predominance of the use of video cameras, a strategically unclean style of shooting and editing, the (self-)enactment of a 'naughty boy' persona in the films, a playful and sometimes uncritical virility that doesn't allow much room for female presence, a narcissistic occupation with possessing the status of an artist, the fantasy of levelling between the self and the Western art canon, an ethnographic gaze towards the surrounding locality that might run the risk of self-exoticisation are some of the characteristics I find in common between the two scenes.⁵

Contemporary art practice in Turkey has always had a willingness to engage in a conversation with and take influences from neighbouring countries. But, this openness towards the outside has mainly been directed towards western neighbours, neglecting the countries of the South Caucasus and the Middle East. This might be due to the subconscious and élitist thinking that the Balkans is key to tying local and European experience together, or it could be due to the relatively higher level of development of the Balkans in artistic terms. Yet, new cartographies are waiting to be developed; new mappings that require the effort and courage to experiment.

5. One difference might be the extent of using national(ist) symbolism. Whereas the Kosovar artists frequently employ signifiers, such as the icon of the double-headed eagle, the colours of black and red, the national anthem of Albania; the artists from Diyarbakır are reluctant to accommodate direct references to Kurdish nationalism. This self-limitation might be the result of the still ongoing pressure on the geography or it might be due to respect paid to the strongly anti-nationalist stance of the Istanbul art scene. I also have to add that the use of national(ist) symbolism in the Kosovar art scene functions as a strategy of individual self-empowerment, a self-positioning as the *Neue Wilden* coming from the periphery and stunning the Europeans, rather than a direct identification with the national cause — these artists are occasionally accused of treason for their collaborations with artists from Belgrade. In that sense it is interesting to see both artistic environments claiming to be 'the new avant-gardes of Europe', a status supposedly attached to them by two important European curators.

Afterword

Spoken Aside: East Art Map meets relations

Katrin Klingan

Around three years ago I sat with Miran Mohar in a café in Ljubljana. We spoke about IRWIN's project on the history of Eastern European art, the first version of which had just been published in the *New Moment* magazine (n° 20, September 2002). *Total Recall* or *East Art Map* presented artistic positions from Eastern Europe, selected by 24 artists and curators, arranged in the form of a map that plotted links. Not a general survey of art history, definitely not yet, but a beginning. An introduction that brushed aside all existing research, historiography and cultivation of legends, and declared the history of art in Eastern Europe to be unknown, territory whose historical and geographical map had yet to be charted. The gesture of *East Art Map*, the assertive proposition of a 'total recall', was as intrepid and provocative as it was fascinating. The history of Eastern European art after 1945 collapsed — according to IRWIN's diagnosis — into single national histories, into fixing and ascribing ideological positions and differences, or it was crushed by the universalistic claims of the West's perspective on art history. However, IRWIN not only named the symptom with its *East Art Map* project, but began instantly with the cure: with positing positions, with comparisons and discussions that deliberately crossed out and confounded existing borders — between scholarship and art, but also between national territories or cultural communities — and thus opened them up to a communicative process of renegotiation.

Listening to Miran Mohar sketch the project's planned continuation, it became increasingly clear to me just how correct my decision to come to Ljubljana was, how IRWIN's artistic projects broached issues that also struck me, the guest from Berlin, as important, such as how cultural exchange between Eastern European societies and Germany could be structured and carried out. As the artistic director of relations, an initiative project of the Federal Cultural Foundation of Germany, it was, and still is my job to initiate and organise this kind of cultural exchange. That was and is no easy task, for, as experience shows, there is a grave danger that well-meant exchange projects launched in the West and targeting the East can result in a 'friendly takeover' rather than a partnership.

To avoid this, we at relations had decided against exporting ideas from Germany to the region of southeastern Europe, focusing instead on direct and local cooperation with artists, curators and theoreticians. The themes they focus on have formed the starting point of each project that has since evolved in the framework of relations. Our method was always to first journey to the countries of Eastern Europe and to sound out in discussions those socially

relevant issues that could and should be brought to the public's attention through artistic means. These issues are mostly ones that surpass the realm of art and touch on local everyday life as well as the politics and history of the respective countries.

relations established links between the Eastern European art projects and German institutions only after these projects were up and running. But here as well, our concern was and is not to transfer artworks; rather, what matters to us is to instigate dialogue on overarching issues and to undertake what IRWIN describes as a 'transplantation of knowledge'. Understood in this way, cultural exchange aims at establishing a lively process of communication, one that confronts 'insider' and 'outsider' perspectives with one another and enables the participants to query their own standpoints.

On that score, IRWIN's East Art Map is an important building block in the work undertaken by relations. For IRWIN's map also emerged out of a process of discussion and the productive friction of contrary positions. The map does not give a basic representation that plots a topography following geographical boundaries and historical events. It is a flexible, reversible map, subjected to ongoing dialogue, a map that displays the conditions determining its own evolution and selections. East Art Map does not represent a uniform 'outsider perspective', it was not plotted from an academic, historical or geographical distance, but has emerged out of a process of recollection and communication. It is the construction of a map that was never sketched in this way, a map that was missing. And as the contours and interrelationships it plots gradually emerge, this map also reconstructs in a self-reflective gesture this sense of having once been missing. And so it comes into existence as the drawing of a map demands: as movement through unknown territory.

IRWIN is currently — supported by relations — injecting East Art Map into the knowledge system via a newly established international university network. Eight institutions — ranging from Moscow to Belgrade and Leipzig — are investigating the premises and implications of East Art Map in a series of seminars and symposia. And this fulfills a wish I have held, namely that IRWIN's artistic project also exerts an impact on academic research and 'transplants' its knowledge and experience to Germany. One initial step, undertaken as I write this, is a symposium entitled 'Mind the Map! History Is Not Given', held in Leipzig in October 2005. The symposium focuses on the conditions of art production and the politics of its representation. The project leaders — the cultural theoretician Marina Gržinić (Academy of Fine Arts,

Vienna, and the Slovenian Academy of Arts and Sciences) and the theatre scholars Günter Heeg and Veronika Darian (University of Leipzig) – plan to utilise the symposium as a testing ground for a ‘triangular research’ approach that embraces researchers, artists and the interested public.

A broad project has hence emerged from an art project in Slovenia that has changed the knowledge systems in Eastern and Western Europe and will continue to do so. The map has already gone beyond being merely a blueprint; it now serves as a compass providing artists and researchers with orientation for their cognitive movement through space and time. Within this map, which has become an influential factor far beyond the narrower confines of art and is rearranging the relationships between east and west, relations itself is only a cog in the wheel. Sometimes I wonder if it wasn't IRWIN who actually selected relations and not relations who selected IRWIN. I'll have to ask IRWIN about this at our next meeting in Ljubljana. And if that's the case, then I'll be pleased that relations has become part of East Art Map. It would be fitting.

www.projekt-relations.de

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IRWIN

The IRWIN group consists of five artists: Dušan Mandič, Miran Mohar, Andrej Savski, Roman Uranjek and Borut Vogeljik. The group was founded in 1983 in Ljubljana and IRWIN was also a co-founder of the NSK organisation. Alongside other activities IRWIN has been engaged in a series of projects which have actively and concretely intervened in social and historical activities in the decade that redefined the status of art in Eastern Europe (*Kapital, NSK Embassy Moscow, Transnacionala, East Art Map* projects). The first three projects mentioned above resulted in books edited by Eda Čufer, who started to collaborate with the IRWIN group at the beginning of the 1990s.

IRWIN is also involved in the creation of three art collections in Eastern Europe.

The members of the group live and work in Ljubljana.

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Selection: Mária Bartuszová, Ivan Csudai, Milan Dobeš, Stano Filko, Jozef Jankovič, Alojz Klimo, Julius Koller, Denisa Lehocká, Roman Ondák, Peter Rónai

Iara Boubnova (BG)

Curator and art critic. Assistant professor at the New Bulgarian University, Visual Arts and Communication Department. Founding Director of the Institute of Contemporary Art, Sofia. Co-curator of *Manifesta 4* (Frankfurt am Main 2002) and co-curator of the first Moscow Biennial in 2005. Numerous articles published in books on contemporary art in Bulgaria and international periodicals and catalogues.

Selection: Luchezar Boyadjiev, Christo & Jeanne-Claude, *The City, E/A Show*, Pravdoliub Ivanov, Lyuben Kostov, Kiril Prashkov, Rassim, Svetlin Roussev, Nedko Solakov, Zlati Velez

Călin Dan (RO)

Art journalist, freelance curator and cultural manager. From 1990 involved in various old/new media projects as part of the art duo subREAL. Currently lead designer of Lost Boys Interactive, Amsterdam. Contributor to mainstream and alternative publications on Internet-related topics.

Selection: George Apostu, Horia Bernea, Ștefan Bertalan, Sorin Dumitrescu, Teodor Graur, Ion Grigorescu, Wanda Mihuleac, Paul Neagu, Sigma, subREAL, Marian Zidaru

Ekaterina Degot (RU)

Art critic, art historian and culture columnist. Professor of 20th-century art, Proarte Institute and European University, St. Petersburg. Co-curator of the Russian pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2001. Her books include *Terrorist Naturalism* 1998 and *Russian 20th Century Art* 2001.

Selection: Mikhail Chernyshev, Collective Actions, Ilya Kabakov, Ilya Kabakov/Vladimir Tarasov, Komar and Melamid, Medical Hermeneutics, Boris Mikhailov, Dmitri Prigov, Lev Rubinstein, Yevgeny Yufit, Konstantin Zvezdochetov

Branislav Dimitrijević (SCG)

Art historian, writer and curator. Director of the Centre for Contemporary Art in Belgrade. Co-founder of the School for the History and Theory of Images in Belgrade where he currently teaches. Published numerous articles on visual culture and contemporary art and politics in Serbia. Curated exhibitions include *Map Room* (Youth House, Belgrade 1995), *Murder 1* (organised by SCCA-Belgrade 1997) and recently *Konverzacija* (Museum for Contemporary Arts in Belgrade 2001).

Selection: Marina Abramović, Mileta Andrejević, Dimitrije Bašičević-Mangelos, Boža Ilić, *The International Exhibition of Modern Art*, Bogoljub Jovanović, Petar Lubarda, Zoran Naskovski, Vladimir Nikolić, Tanja Ostojić, Neša Paripović, Zora Petrović, Mića Popović, Bálint Szombathy, Raša Todosijević, Milica Tomić

Lilia Dragneva (MD)

Director of the Centre for Contemporary Art (ksa:k) in Chișinău. Curatorial work includes: *BANII*, action/manifesto, Chișinău, Video Marathon Night '99; *Identity Signs*, Chișinău; *Regards Projetés* — video programme from the Balkans, Strasbourg, Thessalonica, Belgrade, Sofia, Chișinău (curator of the Moldovan programme), *Donumenta 2004*, Regensburg.

Selection: Pavel Brăila, *Kinovari* (Lilia Dragneva & Lucia Macari), Ștefan Rusu, Mark Verlan

Marina Gržinić (SI)

PhD in philosophy. Works as a researcher at the Institute of Philosophy at the Scientific Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Science and Art in Ljubljana and professor at the Art Academy in Vienna. Freelance media theorist, art critic and curator. Produced numerous video art projects, a short film, many video and media installations, Internet websites and an interactive CD-ROM (in collaboration with Aina Šmid). Her published work includes: *Situated Contemporary Art Practices, Art, Theory and Activism from (the East of) Europe*, ZRC SAZU, Ljubljana and Revolver, Frankfurt am Main 2004, *Une fiction reconstruite. Europe de l'Est, post-socialisme et rétro-avant-garde*, L'Harmattan, collection Ouverture, Paris 2005, *Estetika kibersvijeta i ucinci derealizacije* (Aesthetics of Cyberspace and the Effects of

De-realisation), Multimedijalni institut mi2 —
MaMa Zagreb, Croatia 2005.

Selection: Eclipse, Marina Gržinić and Aina Šmid, IRWIN, Laibach, The Ljubljana Alternative or Subcultural Movement, Kasimir Malevich / Belgrade 1985, Metelkova, Neue Slowenische Kunst, OHO, Dragan Živadinov

Sirje Helme (EE)

Art critic, curator and lecturer on Estonian post-war art. Director of the Centre for Contemporary Arts in Tallinn and curator of exhibitions in Estonia, Finland, Poland, Lithuania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, also at 49th Venice Biennale. Published *A Short History of Estonian Art* 1999 (with Jaak Kangilaksi) and various articles in international publications.

Selection: Ando Keskküla, Raoul Kurvitz, Leonhard Lapin, Malle Leis, Raul Meel, Jüri Okas, Ülo Sooster, Jaan Toomik, Tõnis Vint

Marina Koldobskaya (RU)

Freelance artist, journalist and art critic. Works in the fields of painting, objects, installations. Member of the first Russian women's art group. Director of the Museum of Nonconformist Art, St. Petersburg (1999–2001). Curator of numerous art projects.

Selection: Alexander Arefiev, Valery Cherkasov, I Love You, Life!, Bob Koshekhov and Chronicle Group, New Artists, Evgeny Rukhin, Yevgeny Yufit

Solvita Krese (LV)

Art critic and curator, since 2000 Director of the Latvian Center for Contemporary Art, Riga. She has curated many exhibitions in Latvia and abroad, and published numerous articles and texts about Latvian and international art.

Selection: Famous Five Artists' Group, Gints Gabrāns, Miervaldis Polis, RIXC, Oļegs Tillbergs, Bruno Vasiļevskis, Workshop for the Restoration of Non-Existent Feelings, Aija Zariņa

Elona Lubytė (LT)

Lecturer at Vilnius Art Academy and Vilnius Gediminas Technical University, Lithuania and curator of Lithuanian contemporary sculpture at the Lithuanian Art Museum. Curator of the exhibition

Quiet Modernism in Lithuania 1962–1982 1997.

Selection: Antanas Gudaitis, Vincas Kisarauskas, Juozas Mikėnas, Deimantas Narkevičius, Mindaugas Navakas, Ričardas Povilas Vaitekūnas, Artūras Raila, Eglė Rakauskaitė, Petras Repšys, Paulius and Svajonė Stanikas, Vladas Vildžiūnas

Suzana Milevska (MK)

Art theorist and curator. Currently a PhD student at Goldsmiths College in London. Curated numerous projects in Skopje, Istanbul, Stockholm, Providence, Berlin, Stuttgart and Bonn.

Selection: Slavica Janešlieva, Simon Šemov and N. Fidanovski, Tomo Šijak, Aleksandar Stankovski, Aneta Svetieva, Igor Toševski, Žaneta Vangeli, Zero Group

Viktor Misiano (RU)

Critic and curator of contemporary art. PhD in art history. Previously curator of contemporary art at the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow and numerous exhibitions in Russia and abroad. In 1996 he co-curated *Manifesta 1*, the European Biennale of Contemporary Art. Founder and chief editor of the *Moscow Art Magazine* (from 1993). Has published many articles on contemporary Russian and international art.

Selection: A/Ya Magazine, APT-ART — Series of Events in Private Apartments, Children's Book Illustration in the 60s and 70s, Conceptual Seminar, Exhibition at Bolshoi Sukharevsky Pereulok, Francisco Infante, Muchomor, The Nest, Vladimir Slepian, Dmitry Zhilinsky

Edi Muka (AL)

Professor at the Academy of Fine Arts, Tirana. Director of the International Centre of Culture in Tirana. Curator of the National Gallery and chief editor of its magazine *Pamor Art*. Exhibited in Albania and abroad and curated numerous exhibitions in Albania and internationally. Published many lectures and essays about contemporary Albanian and European art.

Selection: Abdurrahim Buza, Edison Gjergo, Alban Hajdinaj, Flutura and Besnik Haxhillari, Edi Hila, Danish Jukniu, Adrian Paci, Anri Sala, Erzen Shkololli, Sislej Xhafa

Ana Peraica (HR)

Freelance curator and theorist. Awarded UNESCO-ifpc, Jan van Eyck subsidy, two OSI Global Network scholarships and twice BKVB (Fonds voor Beeldende Kunsten, Amsterdam). Curator for 11th Adria Art Annale (Split 1997–8), co-curator of *Rows — Curves — Knots* (Venice Biennale 1999). Peraica was on the selection board for new media as part of Split Film Festival 1998, the *Museum in Progress* (Der Standaard 2001) and *Histories of the New* (ISEA, Helsinki, Tallinn, Stockholm 2004), and was assistant curator of *Indiscipline* (Vanderlinden & Hoffman, Brussels 2000). She is also a regular contributor to *Springerin*.

Selection: Anonymous Author and the Manager, Dimitrije Bašičević-Mangelos, Sanja Iveković, *Feral Tribune*, Andrija Maurović, Aldo Prpić (Svebor Krantz), Red Peristil, Josip Seissel (Jo Klek), *A Tree without an Author*

Piotr Piotrowski (PL)

Professor and chair of Art History at Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, Poland. Co-editor of the annual journal *Artium Quaestiones*. Senior curator of contemporary art, National Museum, Poznań (1992–7). Has published articles and books including *The Avant-Garde in the Shadow of Yalta. Art and Politics in Central-Eastern Europe, 1945–1989* 2005.

Selection: Mirosław Bałka, Jerzy Beres, Tadeusz Kantor, Jarosław Kozłowski, Katarzyna Kozyra, Zofia Kulik, Zbigniew Libera, Natalia LL, Roman Opałka, Alina Szapocznikow, Krzysztof Wodiczko

Jana and Jiří Ševčík (CZ)

Jiří Ševčík is an art custodian and critic. He was director of modern exhibitions at the National Gallery, Prague (since 1993). Professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague (since 1995). Curated numerous alternative exhibitions together with his wife Jana Ševčíkova. Has published many articles on architecture and art.

Selection: Póda Bal, Egon Bondy, Jiří David, Ivan M. Jirous (Magor), Milan Knížák, Jiří Kolář, Jiří Kovanda, Karel Malich, Zdeněk Sýkora, Ladislav Žák

Branka Stipančić (HR)

Art critic and freelance curator. Curator of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb (1983–93).

Director of Soros Center for Contemporary Art, Zagreb (1993–6). Curated exhibitions in Croatia, Slovenia, USA, Austria, Australia and elsewhere. Publications include *Goran Trbuljak* 1996, *Words and Images* 1995, *Ivo Gattin* 1992.

Selection: Dimitrije Bašičević-Mangelos, Gorgona Anti-Review, The Gorgona group, Tomislav Gotovac, Julije Knifer, Ivan Kožarić, Vlado Martek, Goran Petercol, Mladen Stilinović, Goran Trbuljak

János Sugár (HU)

Lecturer in art and media theory, Budapest. Work includes installations, performances, as well as film/video. Films were screened at the Anthology Film Archives in New York in 1998. Exhibited widely throughout Europe including *Documenta IX*, Kassel (1992).

Selection: Balázs Béla Studio (Gábor Bódy, Péter Forgács), András Böröcz and László L. Révész, Attila Csörgő, Róza El-Hassan, Miklós Erdély, FKSE, Intermedia Faculty at the Hungarian Academy of Fine Arts Budapest, György Jovánovics, Lajos Kassák and Sándor Bortnyik, Knoll Galéria, Tamás Komoróczy, Liget Galéria, Gyula Pauer, Tamás St. Auby (Szentjóbó), János Sugár, Kassák Színház

Miško Šuvaković (SCG)

Professor of Aesthetics and Theory of Arts at Belgrade University. Conceptual artist (mid-1970s), member of the Group 143 (1975–80) and theoretician. Published a number of books including *Paragrams of the Body/ Figure* 2001. With Dubravka Djurić editor of the book *Impossible Histories: Historic Avant-Gardes, Neo-Avant-Gardes, and Post-Avant-Gardes in Yugoslavia, 1918–1991* 2003.

Selection: Marina Abramović, Ilija Bosilj, Gera Grozdanić, Olga Jevrić, Vladimir Kopić, Oto Bihalji Merin, Neša Paripović, Vladan Radovanović, Tanja Ristovski, Leonid Šejka, Bálint Szombathy, Ivan Tabaković, Biljana Tomić, Dragomir Ugreš

Igor Zabel (SI)

Senior curator at the Museum of Modern Art from 1986 to 2005, Ljubljana. Curated many solo and group exhibitions with Slovenian and international artists. Published two books of collected essays on

contemporary art, *Vmesni prostor. Eseji o slikarstvu Emerika Bernarda* 1991, and *Speculationes* 1997, and numerous articles in catalogues and magazines. He was one of the curators selected for *Cream 3* 2003, and curated *Individual Systems* at the Venice Biennale 2003. Igor Zabel died in 2005.

Selection: Janez Bernik, IRWIN, Stane Kregar, Zoran Mušič, OHO Group, Marko Peljhan, Marjetica Potrč, Marij Pregelj, Gabrijel Stupica, Tugo Šušnik, v.s.s.d Group/Veš Slikar Svoj Dolg — Painter Do You Know Your Duty

Nermina Zildžo (BA)

Art historian. MA student in Bosnian Cultural Diaspora at Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH. Curator of the Art Gallery of Bosnia and Herzegovina (1981–93). Curator of numerous exhibitions and author of many essays, primarily on contemporary art in Bosnia and the former Yugoslavia.

Selection: Danica Dakić, Braco Dimitrijević, Jusuf Hadžifejzović, Šejla Kamerić, Alma Suljević, Trio, Amir Vuk, Zvono/Bell

Essays:

Inke Arns

Independent curator and author. PhD Humboldt University, Berlin (2004). Since 2005 has been artistic director of Hartware Media Art Association, Dortmund. Since 1993 she has curated exhibitions, festivals and conferences on international media art and culture, such as *OStranenie* (Dessau 1993), *discord — sabotage of realities* (Hamburg 1996–7), *Social Technologies* (Essen 2003), *IRWIN: Retroprincip 1983–2003* (Berlin, Hagen and Belgrade 2003–4).

Besides her publications *Netzkulturen*, *Neue Slowenische Kunst* and *Objects in the Mirror May Be Closer Than They Appear* (both 2002) and *The Avant-Garde in the Rear-View Mirror* (forthcoming by Maska in 2006), she has published widely on net culture, media art and Eastern Europe. www.v2.nl/~arns

Lutz Becker

Studied at the Slade School of Fine Art, London and became a distinguished director of political and art documentaries such as *Art in Revolution* 1971, *Double*

Headed Eagle 1972, *Lion of Judah* 1981 and *Vita Futurista* 1987. A practicing painter, he is also a curator of exhibitions. He collaborated with the Hayward Gallery on *The Romantic Spirit in German Art* 1994, *Art and Power* 1995 and with Tate Modern on *Century City* 2001.

Susan Buck-Morss

Professor of Political Philosophy and Social Theory, Department of Government, and Professor of Visual Culture, Department of Art History, Cornell University, NY. Works in the fields of visual culture, critical theory, cultural studies, and government and political science. Has written on topics including the Frankfurt School, the thinking of Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin, theories of mass culture, and cultural histories of globalization. She is the author of *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* 2002 and *Thinking Past Terror: Islamism and Critical Theory on the Left* 2003.

Roger Conover

Writer, editor, curator. Loeb Fellow at Harvard University. Executive Editor, Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, where since 1977 he has directed the publishing programme in visual and cultural studies, and art and architectural history and theory; and where he edits a series of books on contemporary art in Eastern Europe and another on the writings of contemporary artists. He has written extensively about avant-garde writers, and artists and movements, and through several critical editions has revived the work of modernist poet Mina Loy. He is currently writing a biography of the Dadaist-poet-boxer Arthur Cravan. With Peter Weibel and Eda Čufer, he recently curated exhibitions on contemporary art in Istanbul and the Balkans.

Eda Čufer

Eda Čufer is a dramaturge, curator and writer, whose essays on theater, dance, visual art, culture and politics have appeared in many books and journals. In 1983 she co-founded the theater group Scipion Nasice Sisters Theater. A year later she became one of the founding members of NSK. During the 1990s she worked extensively with NSK's visual art section, the IRWIN group, on a number of conceptual projects, and edited several books relating to those projects,

including *NSK Moscow Embassy: How the East Sees the East* 1992, *Transnacionala: Highway Collisions Between East and West at the Crossroads of Art* 2000 and (together with Viktor Misiano) *Interpol: The Art Exhibition Which Divided East and West* 2001. She also collaborated with the dance group EN-KNAP and the performance and visual artist Marko Peljhan and Project Atol. She has recently co-curated the exhibitions *In Search of Balkania* 2002 and *Call me Istanbul* 2004 (together with Roger Conover and Peter Weibel).

Charles Esche

Charles Esche is Director of the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, and Research Fellow at Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design. He is co-editor of the journal *Afterall* with Mark Lewis and Thomas Lawson and series editor of Afterall Books with Mark Lewis. In addition he is visiting advisor at the Rijksakademie, Amsterdam. A book of Esche's recent essays, *Modest Proposals*, was published by Baglam Press, Istanbul in 2005.

Dr. Michael Fehr

Director of the Karl Ernst Osthaus-Museum, Hagen, Germany, since 1987. Previously Assistant Professor at the Bergische Universität Wuppertal, and Deputy Director of the Art Museum of the City of Bochum. Curated numerous exhibitions on contemporary art, cultural history and city planning, and founded the Kemnade International, a cultural festival in Bochum, Germany (since the 1970s). Teaches Theory of Museums at the Institute for Art History at the University of Bonn, and, since 2003, has headed the board of the Werkbund-Archive Berlin. He has published extensively on contemporary art and the theory of museums.

Boris Groys

Studied at the University of Leningrad. Emigrated from the USSR to the Federal Republic of Germany in December 1981. Currently Professor of Philosophy and Aesthetics at the Hochschule für Gestaltung (School for Design), Karlsruhe, Germany. He has written and edited numerous books, including *Gesamtkunstwerk Stalin* 1988 and *Unter Verdacht. Eine Phänomenologie der Medien* 2000.

Marina Gržinić

PhD in philosophy. Works as a researcher at the Institute of Philosophy at the Scientific Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Science and Art in Ljubljana and professor at the Art Academy in Vienna. Freelance media theorist, art critic and curator. Produced numerous video art projects, a short film, many video and media installations, Internet websites and an interactive CD-ROM (in collaboration with Aina Šmid). Her published work includes: *Situated Contemporary Art Practices, Art, Theory and Activism from (the East of) Europe* 2004, *Une fiction reconstruite. Europe de l'Est, post-socialisme et rétro-avant-garde* 2005, *Estetika kibersvijeta i ucinci derealizacije (Aesthetics of Cyberspace and the Effects of De-realisation)* 2005.

Jürgen Harten

Studied educational sciences, cultural anthropology and art history in Hamburg and Munich. From 1967–8 was secretary for *Documenta 4*, Kassel and from 1972–98 Director of the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf. He is an honorary member of CIMAM (international committee of modern art at ICOM). He has curated numerous exhibitions including: *Marcel Broodthaers: Le Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, Section des Figures* 1972, *Futurismus 1909–1917* 1974, *Malevich from Soviet Collections* 1980, *Gerhard Richter* 1986, *Europäische Konflikte der 30er Jahre in Erinnerung an die frühe Avantgarde (European conflicts of the 1930s with regard to the early avant-garde)* 1987, *Sowjetische Kunst um 1990* 1991, *Pollock/Siqueiros* 1996, *Berlin–Moskau / Moskau–Berlin 1950–2000* 2003.

Sergej Kapus

Painter, art historian and theoretician. Lectures on modern art at the Faculty of Pedagogy in Ljubljana. In 1991 he curated the exhibition *Image and Matter* at the Ljubljana Museum of Modern Art, creating an overview of 'high modernism' in Slovenian painting from the 1970s. In 1998 the Ljubljana Museum of Modern Art (M'ars edition) published his monograph on the painter Jožef Petkovšek. In 1999 he curated the exhibition *Jožef Petkovšek — Duplicate Paintings* at the National Gallery in Ljubljana. He has published many theoretical and critical essays on modern painting.

Erden Kosova

Contributing writer and editor of Istanbul-based contemporary art magazines *art-ist* and *Resmi Görüş*. A member of the post-anarchist collective that currently runs the magazine project *Siyahi*. He recently curated the exhibition *Along the Gates of the Urban* in Galerie κ&s in Berlin and in Oda Projesi in Istanbul. Currently works for the Istanbul-based socialist newspaper *Birgun*. Kosova is also a PhD candidate in the theory of visual culture department at Goldsmiths College, London.

Viktor Misiano

Critic and curator of contemporary art. PhD in art history. Previously curator of contemporary art at the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow and numerous exhibitions in Russia and abroad. In 1996 he co-curated *Manifesta 1*, the European Biennale of Contemporary Art. Founder and chief editor of the *Moscow Art Magazine* (from 1993). Has published many articles on contemporary Russian and international art.

Rastko Močnik

Studied in Ljubljana, Paris and Berkeley, and teaches at the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. He is a member of the international board of directors of the Institute for Critical Social Studies, Sofia and a member of the international advisory board of the journal *Eszmélet* in Budapest. He has published many articles on the epistemology of the humanities and social sciences, the theory of ideology and of the arts.

Ana Peraica

Freelance curator and theorist. Awarded UNESCO-ifpc, Jan van Eyck subsidy, two OSI Global Network scholarships and twice BKVB (Fonds voor Beeldende Kunsten, Amsterdam). Curator for 11th Adria Art Annale (Split 1997–8), co-curator of *Rows — Curves — Knots* (Venice Biennale 1999). Peraica was on the selection board for new media as part of Split Film Festival 1998, the *Museum in Progress* (Der Standaard 2001) and *Histories of the New* (ISEA, Helsinki, Tallinn, Stockholm 2004), and assistant curator of *Indiscipline* (Vanderlinden & Hoffman, Brussels 2000). She is a regular contributor to *Springerin*.

Dr. Sylvia Sasse

Independent art and theatre curator and research assistant at the Centre for Literary Studies in Berlin. Studied Slavic and German Literature in Konstanz, St. Petersburg and Moscow and has a PhD in Russian Literature. She is co-founder of the group Diskursive Poliklinik. Her publications on literary theory, Moscow Conceptualism, East European performance art, totalitarian aesthetics, theatre and court include: *Texts in Action (Texte in Aktion. Sprach- und Sprechakte im Moskauer Konzeptualismus)* 2002; *Collective Bodies. On Art and Politics of Connection (Kollektivkörper. Zur Kunst und Politik von Verbindung)* 2002, edited with Stefanie Wenner; *Art as Punishment. On the Aesthetics of Discipline (Kunst als Strafe. Zur Ästhetik von Disziplinierung)* 2002, edited with Gertrud Koch and Ludger Schwarte; *Gift im Ohr. Beichten und Gestehen in der Literatur* (forthcoming).

Andreas Spiegl

Studied art history at the University of Vienna. Since 1990 he has been a teacher at the Ordinariat für Theorie, Praxis und Vermittlung von Gegenwartskunst of the Academy of Arts, Vienna. Since October 2003 he has been the vice-rector for theory and research at the Academy of Arts, Vienna. He is also a freelance curator and contributing writer for *Springerin*, *Camera Austria* and *Afterall*. He has written numerous publications on contemporary art and art theory.

Igor Zabel

Senior curator at the Museum of Modern Art from 1986 to 2005, Ljubljana. Curated many solo and group exhibitions with Slovenian and international artists. Published two books of collected essays on contemporary art, *Vmesni prostor. Eseji o slikarstvu Emerika Bernarda* 1991, and *Speculationes* 1997, and numerous articles in catalogues and magazines. He was one of the curators selected for *Cream 3* 2003, and curated *Individual Systems* at the Venice Biennale in 2003. Igor Zabel died in 2005.

Slavoj Žižek

Sociologist, philosopher and cultural critic. Studied psychoanalysis at the University of Paris. PhD in philosophy in Ljubljana. He is a professor at the European Graduate School and a senior researcher at the

Institute of Sociology, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. He is a visiting professor at the universities of Columbia, Princeton, New School for Social Research, New York and the University of Michigan.

Žižek is well known for his use of the works of Jacques Lacan in a new reading of popular culture. In addition to his work as an interpreter of Lacanian psychoanalysis, he writes on subjects such as fundamentalism, tolerance, political correctness, globalisation, subjectivity, human rights, Lenin, myth, cyberspace, Postmodernism, multiculturalism, David Lynch and Alfred Hitchcock.

EAM Jury Members:

Georg Schöllhammer

Director of *tranzit Österreich*, arts and culture journalist and curator. Since 1992 he has lectured as a visiting professor at the University for Visual and Industrial Design in Linz, Austria. He was curator for project *translocation (new) medialart* and co-curator of the festival *Du bist die Welt* at the Wiener Festwochen 2001. He is editor-in-chief of *Springerin — Hefte für Gegenwartskunst*. He is also the publisher of a series of publications for *Documenta 12* that will appear from 2005.

Anda Rottenberg

Curator, art critic and historian. Graduated from the University of Warsaw, History of Art Faculty in 1971. She was the first director of the Soros Center of Contemporary Arts in Warsaw. Between 1993 and 2001 she was Director of the National Gallery of Contemporary Art — *Zachęta* in Warsaw. Currently Chief specialist at the Adam Mickiewicz Institute, Warsaw. She has organised and curated over 200 exhibitions in Poland and abroad.

Christoph Tannert

Curator and art critic. Current director and past programme coordinator of *Künstlerhaus Bethanien*, Berlin. He studied archeology and history of art at Humboldt University in Berlin. He curated *Skulptur-Biennale Münsterland 2001*, and co-curated *Berlin-Moskau/Moskau-Berlin 1950–2000 2003*. He co-edited *Men in Black, Handbook of Curatorial Practice 2004*.

Ješa Denegri

Art historian and art critic. PhD in philosophy, Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade. Curator and senior counselor at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MSU) Belgrade until 1991. Currently professor of History of Modern Art and Theory at the University of Belgrade, Yugoslavia. Member of AICA (International Association of Art Critics). Member of the Association of Art Historians of Serbia and the Association of Art Critics of Serbia. Denegri has published many articles and books on art of the twentieth century.

Lia Perjovschi

Lia Perjovschi is an artist, she lives and works in Bucharest. In 1990 she founded the CAA/CAA (Contemporary Art Archive/Center for Art Analysis), a non-institutionalised contemporary art archive and platform for debate, providing a database focusing on art theory, cultural studies, and critical theory.

EAM Jury Coordinator:

Nataša Petrešin

Independent curator and author. Currently a masters candidate at the Theory of Art and Language Department at EHESS in Paris. She was one of the assistant curators of *In the Gorges of the Balkans* at *Kunsthalle Fridericianum*, Kassel 2003, and she curated *Participation: Nuisance or Necessity?* at IASPIS Gallery, Stockholm 2005. She co-edited *Public vs. Private. Cultural Policies and the Art Market in Central and South Eastern Europe 2004*, as well as various exhibition catalogues.

Colophon

East Art Map

Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe

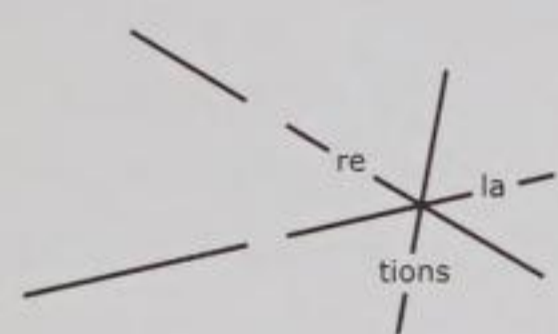
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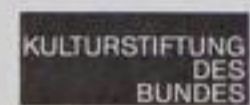
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East Art Map takes place in the framework of relations. relations is a project initiated by the German Federal Cultural Foundation



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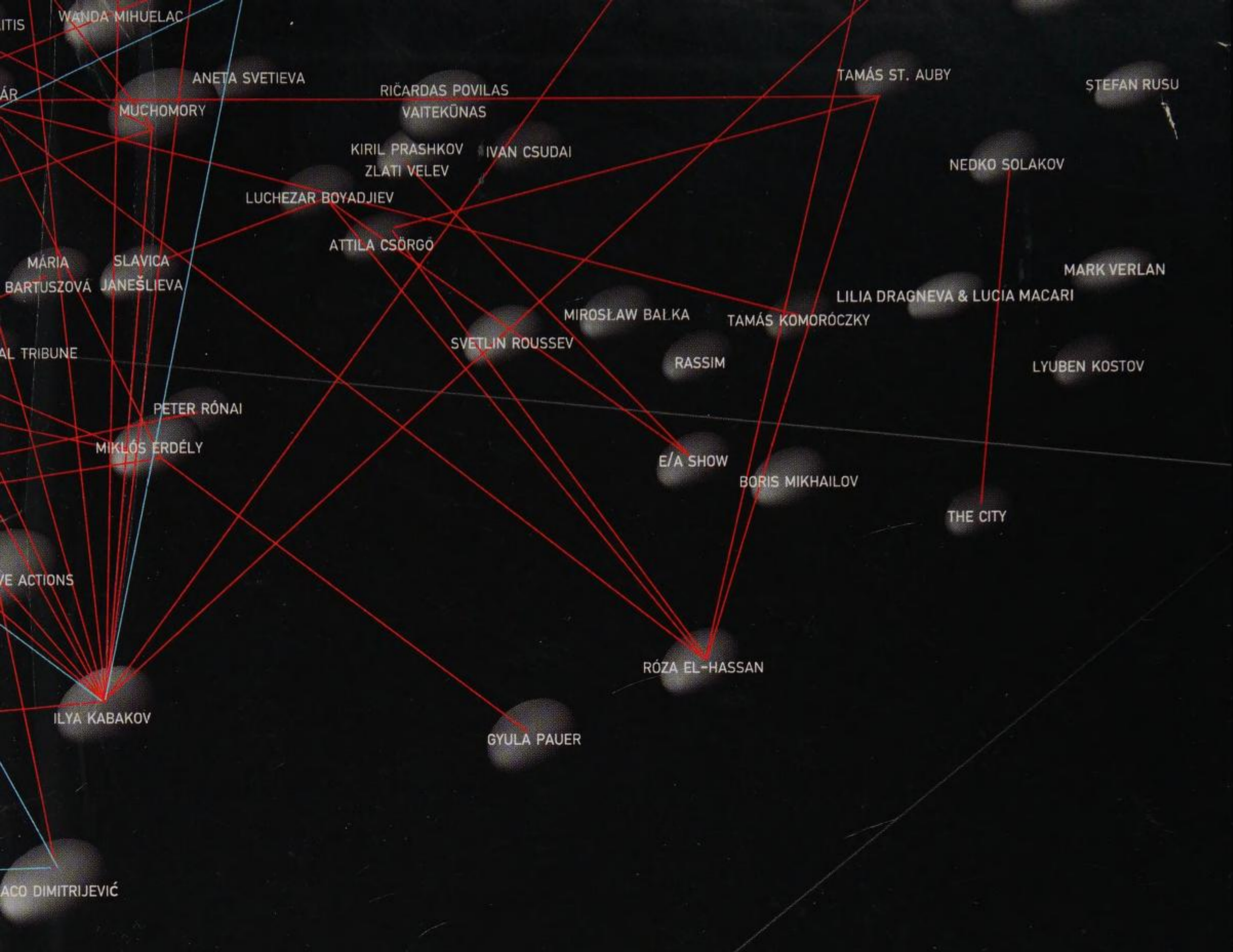
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EAST ART MAP

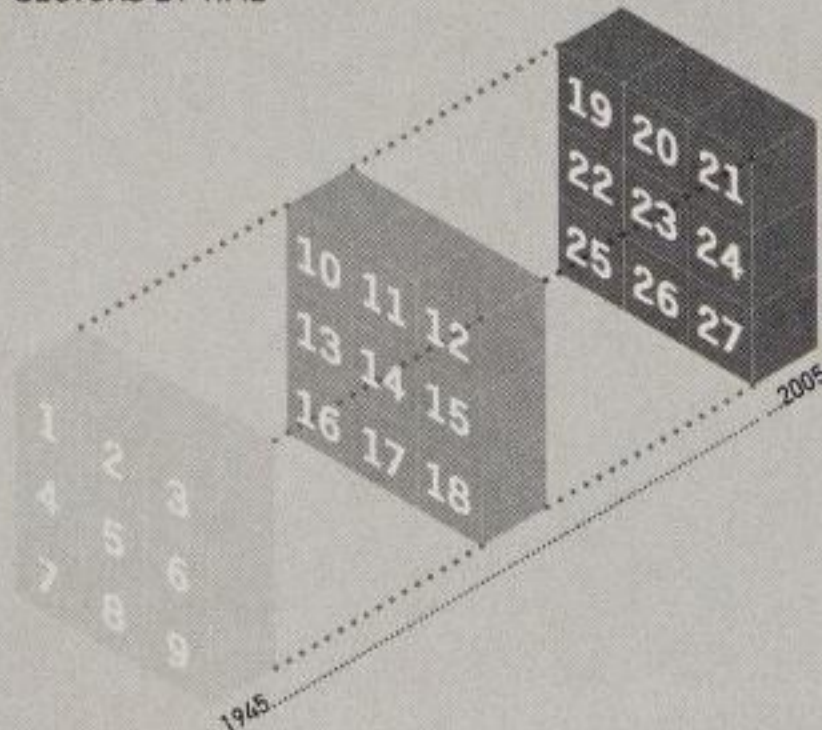
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SECTORS - FRONTAL VIEW

a	b	2c	d	3e
f	g	h	i	j
4k	l	5m	n	6o
p	q	r	s	t
7u	v	8w	x	9

A SLOVENIA	J RUSSIA	S ROMANIA
B	K CROATIA	T RUSSIA
C EAST GERMANY	L YUGOSLAVIA	U BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA
D LITHUANIA	M CZECH REPUBLIC	V MACEDONIA
E	N ESTONIA	W HUNGARY
F SLOVENIA	O RUSSIA	X BULGARIA
G YUGOSLAVIA	P CROATIA	Y MOLDOVA
H POLAND	Q ALBANIA	
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SECTORS BY TIME



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DEVELOPMENT LINES OF SPECIFIC ISSUES

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East Art Map: Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe surveys the extraordinary artistic landscape of the eastern half of the European continent. It is an ambitious attempt to reconstruct some of the hidden histories of contemporary art and offers compelling discoveries for readers based both outside and within these geographic limits. The Slovenian artists' group IRWIN, who initiated the concept of *East Art Map*, have invited artists, curators, theorists and critics to record a wide range of innovations and radical actions that have taken place in the region since 1945. Despite its substantial contribution to a new art history, this book also remains an artists' project, with a subjective and quixotic appeal in addition to its informative contents.

In recent decades Eastern Europe has undergone rapid changes in its political and economic dogmas and it is now among the most significant areas for the production of contemporary culture. *East Art Map* tells the region's compelling histories in different ways, based on a selection of key artworks and artists. For the first time over such a broad terrain, the less celebrated sector of Europe talks to us on its own terms about its past and its future.

Not only does *East Art Map* serve as a guidebook through the visual culture of totalitarian and post-totalitarian societies, it is the largest contemporary art documentation project ever undertaken by the East on the East. 'Where history is not given,' the editors write, 'it has to be constructed.' This book is that construction.

An Afterall Book

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