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Meeting Point

[2.327 words]

Bosnia and Herzegovina



EUROPSKA PRIJESTOLNICA
KULTURE



Institute for
Contemporary
Art Zagreb

This text was archived at the Institute for Contemporary Art in Zagreb collection, as part of the **Research project** conceived in 1997 by a SCCAN – Soros Centers for Contemporary Art Network, funded by the Open Society Foundation, New York.

The purpose of the project was to select, collect and disseminate texts on contemporary art practices in the Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia, around Soros Centers for Contemporary Art, written in and about art of the 1990s. The coordination of the project was carried out by Janka Vukmir, SCCA – Zagreb, today the Institute for Contemporary Art, Zagreb.

We did not intervene in any of texts more than just correcting obvious typos and spelling. On the occasion of collecting texts, we were given permission from all authors, to rightfully use them. If anyone now has different instructions, please, contact us at the info@institute.hr.

All of the texts we have collected at the time have been later published on the website of the I_CAN, International Contemporary Art Network, the short-lived successor of the SCCAN.

On the occasion of the exhibition **90s: Scars**, revisiting the art practices and social and political context of the 1990s in the postcommunist countries, the Institute for Contemporary Art is now reoffering a collection of **89 texts and a comprehensive list of then proposed further readings**, on the website of the Institute for Contemporary Art, www.institute.hr.

The exhibition 90s: Scars is curated by Janka Vukmir and organized by the Institute for Contemporary Art and the MMSU – Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Rijeka, on the occasion of the **European Cultural Capital Rijeka 2020**. Originally planned to open May 14, 2020, at the MMSU in Rijeka, due to COVID-19 crisis, is postponed until further notice.

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BEFORE

The first annual exhibition of the Soros Center for Contemporary Arts Sarajevo, MEETING POINT, will be held at the Art Center Summer Garden ĆULHAN, in Baščaršija, in the heart of the old of the city. Envisioned as an art workshop, a series of actions and events - from video projections to interventions in the space and performances - will last from the end of July until the middle of September 1997.

The works that will be realized or presented during MEETING POINT are: to be selected after a public competition. Invitations: to participate in the exhibition will also be directed to a certain number of artists from Bosnia and Herzegovina now living abroad. Outside of the competition, in the framework offside programs, contemporary foreign productions of art-videos will be shown. As well, artists from neighboring countries will participate as guests of MEETING POINT.

The initiative for MEETING POINT starts from a group of young artists from various disciplines, who have gathered around SCCA-Sarajevo. They are the ones that found the place for activities, the Art Center Summer Garden ĆULHAN, whose owners are open to new art projects and wish the place to become something more than an ordinary city café. Programmatically acting as a centre d'art mobile, SCCA-Sarajevo supports this kind of initiative and stimulates the creation of new forms and spaces for artistic

gatherings and activities. This is how the idea for the annual exhibition-workshop, MEETING POINT, was born.

WHY MEETING POINT?

Post-war artistic life is essentially reduced and impoverished in relation to prewar-materially, institutionally and professionally, and in relation to war-time--creatively.

The information and communication blockade, the loss of contact with what was happening on the local art scene before the war, especially with the phenomena that corresponded to up-to-date artistic currents in the world at the end of the 80s, produced a twofold effect: first, increased need for overcoming the discontinuity and information gap, opening up, communication with the world; and second, dosing off, self-sufficiency. MEETING POINT counts on the first.

The crucial moment at this point in time also presents an awareness about the value of the artistic experience during the war siege. The creative energy manifested in the war produced completely new artistic phenomena (contextual, situational, reflexive, existential art). Artists are changing their behavior (the artist-audience relation), working method, they are using new means. In this context, one must also analyze war video and photo production, created from the feverish need to record the moment between life and death. This not only has to do with the documentary value of known or still as yet unknown author-material (home videos), but it is also about the value of the externalized picture of the condition of people on an existential edge. MEETING POINT wants to collect and valorize a part of this precious material, and again "gather" and guide the scattered creative energy, especially of young artists.

The end of the war and return to "normal" life is disciplining art. Its need for socialising is being lost; it is returning to its "natural place"-to schools, ateliers, galleries. The old hierarchical system is being put back in place.

MEETING POINT proposes a repeat departure into the public, social space that seeks change in artistic thinking and communication with "the casual passer-by."

Coming out of galleries, museums, widening and democratizing the artistic scene, intervening in the open space of the city, poses a challenge to generations of creators. Motives and methods of working in different times were different. But regardless of the time, reason and motive, a change of context calls as well for a change in thinking. and working method. Simply

transporting a finished art object from one context to another changes neither art nor the audience, nor does it bring anything new into their relationship.

MEETING POINT in the Art Center Summer Garden ĆULHAN offers a new art scene that requires neither fixing nor fixing up. This place has its own authentic beauty, history and story. The context of the Ćulhan directs the interventions to consider their relation to the spatial-architectural disposition of the place and its present social function—a meeting-point. Outside of this restriction, everything is open. The boundaries that exist within and between specific media are abolished. A new space seeks new artistic strategies. MEETING POINT is an invitation to a game about which is now known only the place. The rules and type of game will be determined by the authors of the projects and the audience who will participate in it.

AFTER

DIRECTIONS FOR READING

This catalogue has a twofold function: to answer the question about what happened during this fifty-day long, so-called exhibition, in order to, by subsequent examination and analysis, comprehend the different aspects and consequences of the series of events in the Ćulhan. On the other hand, in its documentary part, it remains as the only trace, or evidence of MEETING POINT, because we are dealing with these "impermanent" forms of contemporary art, which we call site-specific art, installations, performances. The catalogue also contains documentation of the second part of MEETING POINT: the video works and side programs, which, compared with "eternal" art, are not substantially lasting.

The reasons for organizing MEETING POINT cited in the first part of the text, as well as other accompanying material (history of the Ćulhan, sketches of the space), were given as an overview to the participants of the publicly announced competition, addressing our intention of opening a unique space for two forms of creative work: one in electronic media and one "live," *in situ*. Our concept, however, was not the result of a theoretical attempt to reconcile and search for a balance between these two, according to socio-psychological consequences, polarized field of activities, about which Paul Virilio has been sharply warning in recent years. In the specific conditions of post-war Sarajevo, the use of specified forms, or better spoken means of expression, and the displacement of MEETING POINT from artistic spaces, has entirely specific reasons and meaning, which we, now just at the initiation of the action, will be fully aware of only when it is over. The use of electronic technology (video during the war; video,

computer/Internet after the war) aside from the previously-cited reasons, is also motivated by the practical impossibility of other forms of exchanging information or extremely delayed direct communication with the outside world. Even the entry into cyberspace, virtual space, in these terms has an "de-alienating" role. Their creative use does not mean a priori an affirmative or a negative, but often a critical or analytical relation toward media/means, so that it may not be identified with the global process of the mutation of interpersonal relations created by virtual reality, that is, denying hic et nunc, the revocation of here in favor of now (Virilio). On the other hand, from the point of view of sociability/communicability, the materiality/physicality of artistic products that originate from themselves in a closed referent system, which do not communicate beyond internal artistic codes and live only in the space specifically created for art, do not produce more meaning and are no less autistic and virtual. That which is created outside of real space and time is art for every time. One of the reasons for our coming out into the city, that we cited in the introductory texts, was also a critique of this kind of post-war re-established artistic and exhibition policy and practice. But the motives of the authors who replied to our invitation were much deeper and more complex, and they were concerned not with the exit into urban space or into a space of urbanity (sociability), but with the re-appropriation of these spaces, after three and a half years of siege and attacks on the city. They dealt with the need for affirmation of the sociability of the artistic act and not with predetermined social functions or the democratization of art, per se.

What kind of effects on the individual work and its meaning are produced by a change of context and working proposition, by the displacement from the space of art into a living space? In this given situation the authors' solutions search outside of the governing artistic conventions. That meant to think context (spatial, societal, historical) and to find the corresponding means and modus of realization outside of the repertoire of artistic means, or to use them in a new way. The work, therefore, is not articulated inside artistic media, but in relation to a new content. The art-historical context is no longer sufficient; the reference-system has changed. That which we received as a result of the widened field of action opened up as well a new field of meaning, which also required different readings/understandings of the works created in the Ćulhan. Speaking about new aesthetic activities, about objectification of mental constructions, or about mental pictures of a place, and not about artistic/aesthetic objects/constructions which describe that place. The answer to the question-what does this work mean: it is not understandable, but rather comprehensible, as Roland Barthes would say. His symbolic energy flows from associative activities, cross references, from a metonymic nature of the work, and even when we deal

with apparently tautological, and in terms of understanding, simple work-with a picture/photographic fragment of nature placed under the "model." Of course this does not deal with rough copying, but rather about the act of transferring computer commands (copy-paste) and moving their results from one context to another. On another level this picture may also function as a sign of a frozen moment in time. Therefore, whether they deal with association, symbol, metaphor, paradox or allegory, all of the works can be read and interpreted on many levels. (Something that is especially interesting, the one problem that didn't exist was the problem of communicating with the Ćulhan audience, mostly casual passers-by, who participated actively in all of the events.)

We can group most of the works/interventions around three basic points related to the Summer Garden ĆULHAN: its past, its timelessness and its present. Many authors used genius loci (the pervading spirit) as a reference, reanimating associatively-symbolically (water, fire, soap, towels), or by way of metaphor and paradox, reminiscences about the historical function of this space (the bath -house-more precisely, the stove -house of the mediaeval public bath). The genius loci of that stone shell in the heart of the old city doesn't only reawaken the memory, but also shapes different associative forms and relations, such as space-time, private-public, morphology of the place-metamorphosis of the space, transcendence (beyond experience) - experience (marking of the place by its associated smells, sounds, materials). Today's function of the Ćulhan (a café-summer garden) directed the authors to interventions in the social space, that meant: to create social games, to transform the space into some kind of theater in which the audience and the performers exchange roles, and through inter active works/actions, to question the relations between people, the relation of the individual and the group.

A number of the works in the given ambient find and offer different references and possible readings, as well as escaping these classifications, whose only intention is easier orientation within the realized material.

This fifty-day series of events, conceived as a change to the governing rules of play (the public competition for participating in the "exhibition" and its being held at a non-artistic site), changed not only the relation to the art scene (at least during MEETING POINT) but also the scene itself. In an ambient in which all spaces and surfaces had the same value, the hierarchical relations between participants of MEETING POINT were abolished, generation differences and artistic "merit" were erased. But beyond visible, in the character of the work, there nevertheless exist

differences between the two generations of the main participants of this event.

Artists of the middle generation, with their built-up and identifiable individual style, easily adapted themselves to the new ambient, not changing, except in the case of Nusret Pašić, either means or form. Experienced and aware of the "adaptability" and "movability" of their work from one cultural context to another, they know that establishing a dialog with new surroundings and a new "company," in the semantic sense, can only enrich their work.

For the youngest generation, who dominated MEETING POINT and who have nothing behind them except their own traumatic life-experience of growing up and maturing in the war, this is the first entrance onto the public scene. The most precious testimony of war and post-war trauma was contained in the video selection of MEETING POINT, shown each night in the Ćulhan. And in the second part-the interventions-the level and precision of the articulation of ideas, surety of appearance, quality of the realized works, revealed the astonishing maturity of this war-generation of authors (which calls for a separate psycho-social analysis). Stepping into the "job" in the Ćulhan without any kind of baggage and prejudice about what art is and what it isn't, they prove their belonging to that generation born in a mass-media world in which the first field of reference is media, and not the history of art. Their appearance and entrance onto the scene gave an essential tone and entire meaning to MEETING POINT.

And finally-the audience, or the thousands of people who passed through the Ćulhan last summer, who from casual passers-by became audience/participants of this wonderful event, dropping by every day to see "what's new". In this, according to our intention, a democratic ambient established itself as well as a more natural, more correct relation of artist-audience, because the mediator in that relation-the art work-loses its traditional artistic characteristics, and the communication code is no longer limited to language of art. The entrance of the arts into the space of everyday life, its non-didacticism and unpretentiousness-we don't change the world, we just want to become part of that world-is the fundamental strategy and message of today's arts, which belong to that which we called MEETING POINT.