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**No Wave
Art in Yugoslavia 1992 – 1995**

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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.

Lidija Merenik

No Wave Art in Yugoslavia 1992 – 1995

1. The dominant characteristic of Yugoslav art in the period 1992 – 1995 is an evident artistic bridging of the gap of the period indicated in the title, the overcoming of a shock at the developments, an attempt at organizing oneself in a new way after the brutal disintegration of the Yugoslav cultural environment and the like. Despite the prevailing conditions, and considering the unbroken continuity of artistic activity, one cannot speak about a "break" in the art of this period due to simple logic that artistic production did not stop or cease physically to exist, and that in some of its activities it demonstrated an exceptional vitality and a capacity for intelligent realignment. I believe that we would encounter similar "dislocations" in defining or, at least, in delimiting artistic territory even if it were not for the well-known historical and political upheavals. For the difficulties and polemics associated with defining and penetrating the entanglement of artistic ideas and languages have already been observed since the late 1980s, as well as in the early 1990s when the first attempts were made to define new artistic phenomena.¹ That things are not so

¹ In the late summer of 1993, Novi Sad was the venue of the exhibition *The Early Nineties the Yugoslav Art Scene*, the first synthesis of artistic events at the turn of the decade. The exhibition included mostly younger Yugoslav artists and pointed to the basic recent trends the phenomena of "figuration", "new geometry", new sculpture. By drawing on a thesis about a generation wave, the authors desisted in part from an analysis of the directions of the continuity with the art of the 1970s and 1980s, which is evident by the absence of the artists advocating these directions. The thesis was later repeated in a similar way at *The Biennial of the Young Artists in Vršac (1994)*, relying to a great extent on the definition of the generation creative "new wave" of the first half of the 1980s. The division into basic poetics and possible means of expression, which was made at that time, has been preserved to a degree up to the present. This is best confirmed by more recent exhibitions which mostly accept such a "map" of discursive pluralism of the art scene of the 1990s. In fact, various projects realized thus far (from the mentioned exhibition *The Early Nineties*, through the *Biennial in Cetinje in 1994*, to *The, Gaze Scenes and Map Room....* And more recent ones, *Experiences from Memory, Tendencies of the Nineties, A Gaze at the Wall, 2nd Biennial of the Young Artists in Vršac*

simple was demonstrated by artistic production itself, a still vigorous scene which, less than ever in the period after the 1950s, had the features of a generation wave. In the first half of the 1990s, it displayed unbelievable chameleonic tendencies, the charm of which can be credited with any linguistic and interpretative confusion and embarrassment. It has also become clear that it could not be the question of any new "new wave" since the seemingly chaotic art scene adopted, as early as the late 1980s, another strategic model of moving and "mapping"² the scene which is probably the underlying cause of the mentioned "confusion". The strategy and/or the effect of the exhibition Map Room reminds us of one of the accomplishments of that postmodernism which never interpreted itself, neither during the 1970s nor during the 1980s in particular, by means of morphology or an exclusively formal identification of the phenomena. The foundation of these starting points lies in the process of relativization or, to be more precise, deabsolutization of the historical and the loss of faith (or confidence) in history (as once simply stated by McEvelley, postmodernism emerged at the time when people stopped believing in progress and that history is on our side). It is the question of a symbolic destruction of the "pillars of modernism" a hierarchical matrix of culture and the disturbance of its legitimate time by which development is measured, the idea of progress (which is then no longer linked to development), and the dispelling of an illusion about some monolithism in modernism created over time, which can be most likely credited to the postwar picture of high modernism which during the Cold War, for example, manifested widely varied ideological views. The "destruction of the pillars" itself should not be understood as an act of destroying; it is only a metaphor of another situation. Likewise, it is the distinctive feature of the ongoing processes in general, regardless of whether we call them "postmodern", "modern" "neomodern" or "premodern" and, why not, "antimodern"³.

in 1996.) point to an invigorating climate offering various possibilities and methods for interpreting contemporary Yugoslav art.

² Although not for the first time (here mention should be made of thematic exhibitions that forced the "work on a theme" in a similar way or "creative author's writing", such as Benjamin in Belgrade, Students' Cultural Center, 1994, the projects within the magazine *New Moment* and the like), the model was defined in terms of a concrete program on the occasion of the exhibition Map Room (Dom omladine Gallery in Belgrade, 1995) which can be considered as a symbolic completion of this four-year cycle.

³ It is the question of a number of parallel and legitimate artistic discourses, ideologies and interpretations which polemicize with each other at times but, in my opinion, do not go beyond highly professional dialogues. Thus, they are perfectly welcome and useful for a living and, in every respect, open and competitive artistic and critic's organism of the global scene which does not approve the nervousness of anyone's or any interpretation.

2. To define the dominant characteristic of contemporary art in general and of Yugoslav art in the period 1992-1995 in particular, one can use the term "fictional site", which is the most valuable legacy of the 1980s (now reduced and interpreted from the viewpoint of unexpressionism and certain formal purism). This term may also include the notion of active escapism the creation of a parallel-fictional reality and quite personal stories which actually would not have emerged if they had not been motivated by the existential reality itself which was sometimes able to surpass fiction itself. Consequently, artistic fiction and fabulation are not understood in the sense of a legible, visual content or morphology of the work, but as an essential element of the ideological character of the complete art scene, regardless of the artistic languages to which the fragments of this scene gravitate. Namely, accounts do not converge in narration or figuration but in the method and are beyond those worn-out notions. This is a metalanguage of a different quality, one that can narrate although this is not so important to it, one that seduces you and entertains you but never gives you the right answer nor does it impose any norm, let alone the norm of absolute taste.

The term "fictional site" is the closest to the possible definition of several, morphologically different artistic trends that have been developed since the late 1970s and early 1980s, assuming their chameleonic character in the early 1990s. The works of Predrag Nešković and Marija Dragojlović, as well as those of young artists clearly demonstrate their affinities for the concept of the fictional. Nešković's exhibitions held during the 1980s and especially his retrospective at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade (1988) are a good example of his interstylistic, nomadic activity continued during the 1990's too. By means of a pastiche of citations, imitations surrogates and reproductions, they offer an authentic local version of "bad" painting which is probably the boldest in the Yugoslav painting of the 1980s. In any case, Nešković develops his poetics based on the popular and object, freed from a methodological consistency and high art. This idea is advanced in one, not yet exhibited, series *War Period* dating from the first half of the 1990s, as well as in his more recent paintings which still make use of the lot and concept of a humorous and self-ironical inconsistency, and challenge the notion of the true and authentic.

Marija Dragojlović's idea about objects dating from the 1980s is still drawing on the creation of a metaphysical dimension of the presentation and new quality of "cool" poetic intimism. This will especially become apparent on her large canvases (*Boxes, Mirrors* 1989-1990) and, during the 1990s, in her new cycle of *Mirrors*, created in continuance of her works from the late 1980s.

There is no doubt that the recent forerunners of this fictional trend are the artists whose work is most directly linked to the poetics of the 1980s, especially Mrđan Bajić and Mileta Prodanović. In the first half of the 1990s, the sculptures of Mrđan Bajić (made mostly in Paris) overcame the possible crisis of the rhetoric characteristic of the wave of the 1980s. Bajić's participation in international exhibitions and the 25th October Salon, the presentation of his *Vocabulary* in the Gallery of the Students' Cultural Center in Belgrade (1995), in addition to the installation *Migratious* in the National Museum (*Experiences from Memory*), show a unique poetic vitalism of his position: to him it is unacceptable to keep quiet about reality but so is to speak loud. In this interspace of artistic involvement, he produces his sculpture-stories *Of Towns*, *of Arms*, *of the Internal Organs* and *of Oblivion*.

An offshoot of new Belgrade sculpture, whose forerunners in the late 1990s were the works of Dragan Jelenković, Marina Kujundžić and Božica Radenović, persists in the most expressive way through the works of Nina Kocić, Dragana Ilić, Tanja Vondraček and others.

One can observe the burgeoning of a flamboyant kind of "fictional" figuration painting, whose origins can be traced in the work of Milica Tomić as early as the end of the 1980s, and which reached its peak in the paintings of urban fabulation by Uroš Đurić. He is certainly one of the most significant younger painters of the Belgrade art scene. Although the contents, themes and genres of his paintings are utterly unconventional in their combination of various personal stories and revived influences of urban, rock, popular, mass and even high culture, they clearly demonstrate a burgeoning, authentic talent for painting. One of the best examples of a balance among the mentioned influences, affinities and clearly identifiable writing is Đurić's painting *The Flying Self Portrait with Milica's Mountains Bernik's Factory and Suprematistic Plain*. The beauty of this paintings lies also in a pleasing yet resolute rejection of artistic mystifications of the work itself, while an ironical approach to the concept of culture and its contemporary and/or historical strata makes Đurić's work an excellent representative of something that can be called "fictional site" or "active escapism". A conditionally similar approach can also be observed in the works of Daniel Glid and Stevan Markuš, for example.

Since its beginnings, the Artistic Group FIA (formed in 1989, with Stanislav Sharp and Nada Rajačić constituting its core) has been concerned not only with an apparent promotion of the artistic in photography, but also with the

reading, use and recycling of the legacy of the Serbian avant-garde (Belgrade Surrealism and Micić's Zenit). In this spirit, as well as in combination with state-of-the-art technology and high professionalism of the authors, A.G. FIA acts as a creative workshop which, always in cooperation with appropriate sponsors, presents its projects on a regular basis, of which the magazine L'Impossible is the most important for the modern history of Serbian photography. On the other hand, A.G. FIA also acts as an animator of those cultural events which turn attention to the much neglected medium of photography itself, as well as to the littleknown history of Serbian modern photography.

The Škart group (Dragan Protić, Đorđe Balmazović and, until recently, Vesna Pavlović) has been active, since 1990, in a specific space opened between different media and disciplines, such as graphic design on one side and fine arts, photography, music and poetry on the other. Škart is creating the image of "poor" and simple design combined with "poor" materials and means, and with an underlying idea that every project (Sadness is a good example) must be communicative as much as possible and that it must promote itself by itself. There is also an "off" trend in the urban artistic "guerrilla" whose leading exponents were Miomir Grujuć-Fleka (later the guiding spirit of the project Urbazona) during the 1980s and Saša Marković (masks, multi-media projects, radio programs and the like) during the 1990s. There is no doubt that Nenad Racković led the radical behaviour trend of the 1990s scene to the extreme, as well as to theatrical absurdity, while at the same time being the lonely "representative" of this specific and brutal life-art which originates most directly from the global atmosphere and the spirit of the 1990s.

3. The emergence of the "neomodern" trend as defined, for example, by Andrea Branzi in his book *Learning from Milan*⁴, also deserves attention. It is evident that the very title of this book (ironically?) alludes to the cult book of postmodernity, Venturi's *Learning from Las Vegas*. Nevertheless, Branzi's opposition is not black and white and is offered in the form of a subtle dialogue with the "ballast" of that rhetoric of postmodernity which was interpreted by Venturi. The phenomenon of a "second modernity" is interpreted by means of architecture and design, as was the case with postmodernity. According to Branzi, the distinctive features of the "second modernity" include a decentralized study of new technological processes and the use of new materials, including a great number of manmade ones. They create an "artificial universe" and, in some respects, challenge the

⁴ Andrea Branzi, *Learning from Milan, Design and the Second Modernity*, MIT Press, 1988.

idea of the modern, embodied in the purposiveness principle and the identity principle, as well as in an ideological canon of standardized or mass production which could impart to the original modernity a certain, not insignificant, populist character, at least when architecture and design are concerned. Thus, in most cases, the "neomodern" trend itself is not linked to the authentic idea of interwar modernism by its being, its ideology or its substance. As shown by artistic production itself, there is also a possibility that "neomodernism" becomes as close to modernism by its form and as far from it by its being as is conceivable. Consequently, it is permissible, albeit not compulsory, that it also participates in the mentioned disturbance of the mainstay of modernism, but in a probably less noticeable manner. When, for example, Branzi speaks about a "second modernity", he has in mind the acceptance of modernity as an "artificial" cultural system which is not based on the purposiveness principle or the identity principle, that is, on a symbolic mainstay of modernity, but on a set of cultural and linguistic values. On the other hand, the idea of Heinrich Klotz is also similar: "What remains from the project Urbazona) during the 1980s and Saša Marković (masks, multimedia projects, radio programs and the like) during the 1990s. There is no doubt that Nenad Racković led the radical behavior trend of the 1990s scene to the extreme, as well as to theatrical absurdity, while at the same time being the lonely "representative" of this specific and brutal life-art which originates most directly from the global atmosphere and the spirit of the 1990s. 3. The emergence of the "neomodern" trend as defined, for example, by Andrea Branzi in his book *Learning from Milan*⁴, also deserves attention. It is evident that the very title of this book (ironically?) alludes to the cult book of postmodernity, Venturi's *Learning from Las Vegas*. Nevertheless, Branzi's opposition is not black and white and is offered in the form of a subtle dialogue with the "ballast" of that rhetoric of postmodernity which was interpreted by Venturi. The phenomenon of a "second modernity" is interpreted by means of architecture and design, as was the case with postmodernity. According to Branzi, the distinctive features of the "second modernity" include a decentralized study of new technological processes and the use of new materials, including a great number of manmade ones. They create an "artificial universe" and, in some respects, challenge the idea of the modern, embodied in the purposiveness principle and the identity principle, as well as in an ideological canon of standardized or mass production which could impart to the original modernity a certain, not insignificant, populist character, at least when architecture and design are concerned. Thus, in most cases, the "neomodern" trend itself is not linked to the authentic idea of interwar modernism by its being, its ideology or its substance. As shown by artistic production itself, there is also a possibility that "neomodernism" becomes

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Probably the best examples of the neomodern trend defined in this way are just the phenomenon of new sculpture and the project Mondrian 1872-1992. Launched in the early 1990s, the project Mondrian 1872-1992 was presented at an exhibition in Pančevo in 1992 and included the works by Zoran Naskovski, Nikola Pilipović and Aleksandar Dimitrijević. One of the protagonists, Zoran Naskovski, produced his best works just over the past two years, within the exhibition-projects The Gaze Scenes and Map Room. In considering Zoran Naskovski's work, one can speak about the project Mondrian 1872-1992 as "painting on Mondrian", where the notions of "painting" and the historical notion of Mondrian's work are also quite conditional. For one must distinguish three possible author's approaches (positions) and three possible interpretations: Painting Mondrian by Goran Đorđević (1983), the project Mondrian 1872-1992 by the three mentioned authors which is, in the case of Naskovski, based on the concept of work with, that is, the model is the object of processing material (in some of his later works, Naskovski worked with Shirin Neshat's photograph) and which, in contrast to Đorđević, supports the idea of authorship and the principle of artistic-creative will, and finally, the third approach that involves the revitalization of the entire civilizational philosophical-ideological model to which Mondrian's painting is one of the symbols of the historical period of modernism.

During the period 1992-1995, sculpture had two dominant characteristics: the awareness of historical values of the media taken as the possible object of processing and a positive attitude towards the tradition of modern

⁵ Kloc, Hajnrih, *Umetnost u XX veku, Moderna-Postmoderna-Druga Modernia*, Novi Sad, 1995.

sculpture, towards the "tradition of the modern" in general, and towards the revival of Conceptual art and/or Arte povera. Within the process we have been following since the early 1990s, one can observe that sculpture varies its attitude towards its own traditional or conventional features. In the first half of the 1980s, the youngest art scene contributed to the distancing from a conventional understanding of the media, as well as the shaping and spatial qualities and premises of sculpture itself. On the other hand, the term "sculpture" has also become very problematic: it is being increasingly substituted for the awkward word "installation" in order to designate a set of different elements and materials in space which constitute a complete entity, the elements of one exhibit-work. Thus, the notion of installation in sculpture becomes apparent through the will of the artist's designation and the will of the critic's convention on such a designation. Installation observes two historical prerogatives: the introduction of space as an active factor of sculpture and the introduction of wall as a constituent element (or background) of sculpture.

Since the early 1980s, the greatest contribution in this area has been made by Mrđan Bajić, Dragoslav Krnajska, Vera Stevanović and Darija Kačić and, a little later, toward the end of the 1980s by Dejan Anđelković and Jelica Radovanović, as well as the Workshop of the Students' Cultural Center, including Srđan Apostolović, Dušan Petrović, Zdravko Joksimović and Bata Kvirgović. Among the younger artists, mention should be made of Gabriel Glid, the Artistic Association Absolutely, as well Mirjana Đorđević and Ivan Ilić. At the beginning (1991), Absolutely functioned as Absolutely Sculptural (Zoran Pantelić and Rastislav Škulec) and in this early phase it regarded the medium of sculpture as its dominant mode of expression. The subsequent phase, from 1993/94 onwards (Zoran Pantelić Dragan Rakić, Dragan Miletić, Bojana Petrić), is featured by disregard for the limits of the medium, abandonment of the sculptural-material and shifting to a conceptual, multimedia mode of expression which is often on the risky borderline of dematerialized art, as evidenced by new projects such as Absolutely Dead (1995) and Azbuka apsolut in Wien (1995).

Gabriel Glid, on one side, and Mirjana Đorđević and Ivan Ilić, on the other, make use of all potentialities of sculpture-installation. Whereas Glid's work is based on research into a rich "tradition of the modern" and rarely exceeds the limits of the sculptural, Apostolović is concerned, as of lately in particular, with the sculpture-object problems, linking them to the elements of design and manipulating their identity. Mirjana Đorđević and Ivan Ilić also draw on some of Apostolović's starting points, at least with respect to the identity of the sculptural and its relationship with other sculptural ideas and

methods which really originate from design. By applying the principle of series and successive repetition of like or related element-forms (mostly differing), they "clean" the created forms of the author's personalized and subjective writing to the greatest possible degree, while at the same time arresting their attention to the significance of the author's concept.

It appears that the forms of the so-called "neomodern trend" correspond in an unusual way to the sensibility of the "secondline" authors, representatives of the "new artistic practice" of the 1970s, like Neša Paripović (his work at the exhibition *The Gaze Scenes* in 1995 was singled out), Era Milivojević (especially the works at his one-man show in the Gallery of the Belgrade Cultural Center, as well as those displayed at the exhibitions *From April to April* and *The Gaze Scenes* at the Veljković Pavilion), Ilija Šoškić (who has been living in Greece as of late and displays his projects in Belgrade only on rare occasions) and Raša Todosijević, who have been experiencing their creative revival, whether paradoxically or not, just over the past few years. Since the second half of the 1970s already, Todosijević has not been interested in modern-postmodern methodology to such a degree as in the development of a new, metalinguistic and ideologically colored system out of the being of art itself, as well as in a critical approach to the established art system itself. He demonstrated this by his book *Stories of Art* (1992) and the works displayed at the exhibition *Europe Rediscovered* in Copenhagen (1994/1995). Chameleonic "postmodernism" is probably the most acceptable and most comprehensible just to this generation of artists. Political involvement (Todosijević), social and critical consciousness (Milivojević) and subtle poetry of "poor installation" following up on tautological expression (Paripović, Šoškić) persist here as a perfect synthesis of something that is called the "second line" in Serbian historiography which, as can be seen, succeeded in maintaining its continuity even two decades after the phenomenon of "new artistic practice".