

Mikhail Rashkovetsky

Odessa Experiment

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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.

Mikhail Rashkovetsky

Odessa Experiment

I don't know, if the time has come to gather stones. But all of us want to gather stones, those who toil along a ruined labyrinths, casting aside new ruins, where everything seems to have already been ruined. We have felt the inadequacy of destruction and cleansing the decayed layers if not on the rational level, at least at the physiological womb level. Because life, in the chaos of crocks and pieces of the layers, transgresses to non-life in a short time.

We already want to go simply from point A to point B, but not to painfully reflect upon how to move a center of gravity, to move forward a thigh, to bend a knee joint, to move a foot and - primarily - where to place it so as not to break one's neck. It is really necessary for this purpose to cleanse a place, i.e., to gather up the crocks and pieces into a pile aside a given route. However, firstly everything falls out of our hands which have numbed slightly in the form of one holding a hammer used to break stone that must be scattered. Secondly, everyone wants to simply go his own private way. All this causes continuous collisions of carriers of stones, heading in different directions. The consequence of all this, as at one time is scattering which, however, is marked with good intentions of gathering.

We once more struggle with the damned question of the 20th century: how could we climb to the heights of sobomost /assembly/ and not lose the value of individual.

Certain experience in constructing a whole organic body from the products of societal and individual decomposition was gained in the Odesa Center for contemporary art Tirs. It is situated in three halls of the House for folk art, which actually occupies the former house of Bzhozovsky / commonly called The Shah's Palace/, located on Komsomolsky boulevard opposite /across the Teshchin bridge/ the former Vorontsov Palace, then called Palace of Pioneers, then silence.

This experience was preceded by the 1.5 year activity of Center curated by M.Zharkova, which had been molded by Odesa's first private museum of contemporary art of the Tirs firm, as well as the Novy Prostir /New Space/ Foundation of Uta Kilter. A direct incentive to push Odesa inhabitants to gathering experience, was the overture by the Kiev Soros Center for Contemporary Art in the form of a conference Dialogue and Discourse as well as the creating another institution - the Odesa association Nove Mystetstvo /New Art/. This physically brings together artists and art critics, which adopted the Charter of association and the apory of its name. This conglomeration of institutions: museums, centers, foundations, associations, combined with the decentralized notion of contemporary art, to this undefined, undetermined ad definitio category, - has become spontaneously the nutrient bouillon for the organisms that are the subjects and objects of this experiment.

Before the arrival of the dear invited guests, Marta Kuzma and Bill McAlister, as well as the uninvited but also dear Leonid Bazhanov, who came for the opening of the Odesa Academy /sic!/ of Arts, Tirs activists dismantled the exhibition of folklore primitives before the appointed time, bringing to hall everything they could carry /i.e., the installation by V. Ryabchenko and the deconstructive series by O. Roitburd, which recently returned from a show in Warsaw, Steppes of Europe by Y. Onuch, the graphics by D. Oreshnikov, the simulation mosaic by O. Migas and A. Hankevich, intimate objects by A. Lisovsky and T. Goncharenko as well as on the free standing easel, the work of the living classic of Ukrainian painting Y. Yegorov/. Authors of the program O. Roitburd and V. Ryabchenko frankly named their exhibition Accidental and on November 29, 1993, the timer started. In the Center a polemical discussion took place on the meaning of the Accidental category in culture, philosophy, art and in the personal life of some participants of the discussion. Two following considerations were adopted almost unanimously regarding the exhibitions: 1/ the name of exhibition is absolutely wrong and the manifestation of authors (the mechanism of our selection can be thought of as a black box: on entering there is a chance collection of names and works, and on exiting - an unintentional cross-section of local artistic life) is not correct because the authors of program rather transparently played the role of the black box; 2/ the name of exhibition is completely correct because it was organized for an occasion and takes in all that is inadmissible. They resolved: systematically and persistently to raise the quality level of structuring exhibitions and events, also taking into consideration accidental ones, if any should take place further.

Odesa press offered a lively reaction to this action with an article by O. Roitburd Accidental links which was published in the newspaper Slovo,

with an introduction by assistant editor F. Kokhriht, who is also President of the Tirs Center.

Evening, then morning, then on also December 25, 1993, the opening day took place of the openly authors project by O. Roitburd Lying Nude.

Installed at the exhibition were works with beautiful painting against the consciously ruined, indifferent background together with the tapestry represent corpus delicti of the fact of stratification of discourse, the author asserted.

A rather independent (even too independent, according to O. Roitburd/ part of the exhibition was the text by Odesa's resident and Master of the Tartu University V. Bezprozvannyi.

Slovo reacted to the exhibition with the good-natured advertisement by Kokhriht. Odeskiy Vestnik included a large comment by the author, which based the right to represent a working private language problem. The Bezprozvanny's comment was added to this. Within the correct words of Bezprozvanny a tense struggle between the interpreter and interpreted for the right to control the meta-language of description was hidden. M.

Rashkovetsky, in the conclusion of his article in Vechernaya Odesa stated, that he considered Lying Nude to be the author's creative failure, but he in no way argued his position, because the rest of the article was dedicated to explaining the terms discourse, deconstruction and euphemism /using the word bear/.

An heated debate concerning the problem of exiting /not-exiting from the language house and the dual code of interrelations between the subject and object of interpretation in the situation of neutralized subject - object opposition was waged in the Center.

It was unanimously resolved to develop systematically and regularly promotion and propaganda for an elite hyper-intellectualized art among the broad masses of creative and scientific intelligentsia, students, businessmen, so they would interpret the objects and texts of the research group not as psychopathological symptom, but with understanding or, at least, with sacred respect.

Departing from Accidental and Nude H. Bohuslavskaya and M. Rashkovetsky organized an easy, popular project named Horrible-Amorous. They presented to the audience works by artists V. Vasilevsky, V. Vladimirov, A. Hankevich, O. Mihas, J. Gusev, D. Dulfan, L. Dulfan, V. Kabachenko, A. Kazandji, S. Lykov, S. Martynchuk, V. Pavlov, H. Podvoyskiy, O. Roitburd, V. Rjabchenko, V. Sirenko, I. Stepin, E. Nekrasova, Z. Sokol, V. Harchenko. As an object of appreciation, there were presented not the works, but their interpretation in the form of a traditional museum excursion. This traditional form was accompanied by radio-verbal and noise interpretation (live on air), with explanatory texts,

with polar opposites (one of excursions, devoted to the blessed memory about Aristotle, examined the problem of horrible or death as a non-recognition, and another, naturally, at the same exhibit, devoted to the blessed memory of Plato, focused on moments of the amorous as non-recognition of the second order.

The booklet text devoted to the memory of the unforgettable Hertzen, popularly established the right for the excursion itself to be worthy of an artifact and on opening day was Blood Mary and champagne during the excursions Horrible and Amorous respectively.

The Odesa press had reacted to this event with six publications, distinguished by name: A complete felling out in Odessky Vestnik and The crash of destroyed hopes in Viechernyaya Odesa, and in content - an irate account by O. Roitburd "Leave our field!" In the latter, the author suggested that art critics find a place in parliament, more precisely, - the place on the swing of the artistic process. Art critics were recommended not to change defenseless creators on their rightful playing field, but to begin from another side, revealing the hidden meanings or artistic games in academic style while wearing pressed trousers. An article was published as a response called "Oh, field, field! Who has sown you...", signed by M. Rashkovetsky, tour guide. The sense of the retort can be reduced to a traditional formula: You are the same, yourself, because it is still unknown, who supplants whom on the above-mentioned swing of the 20th century. There were 8 excursions in total with groups ranging in size from 2 to 50 persons, and there was also a tele-excursion, where the audience size can hardly be estimated.

A discussion on hermeneutics of art and the art of hermeneutics also took place in the Center.

It was unanimously resolved to restrain the tyranny of curators by limiting their freedom to seek financial sources.

The following event at the Center was a pure project by a circle of artists, which independently and individually realized an idea, born in these artists themselves (A. Hankevich, A. Kazandji, O. Lisovskiy, O. Migas, V. Bondarenko, O. Gusev, Y. Depechemode, O. Roitburd, V. Riabchenko, L. Tokaryeva, O.Shevchuk). In early Spring (March 4) their exhibition "Lux ex Tenebris" ("Light from darkness") was held. In the explication, V. Bezprozvanny precisely defined the main aim of the event: A collective project by a group of Odesa artists, united under the aegis of the association Nove Mystetstvo is a private (and thus, not burdened by a uniting theme) attempt to bring back substantiality to Light.

Light has its own self-value in the majority of the given objects, and not just properties of a technical product were squeezed out of it, but also the traditional auxiliary functions of recognition through the light-darkness opposition. In this case, Light did not illuminate things, but dematerialized them, transcendentalized them, continuing its physical flow. It wasn't identical with itself and round itself in the context of cult, occultism and metaphysics.

In this project, the intention of creation was strongly articulated side by side with all remaining traces of destruction. It became rather evident that the Center's activity, beginning with the Accidental exhibition and ending with the Light from Darkness can be considered only as complete event, which unfolded in time and appeared in a discrete, separate and even in a enclosed manner, but according to an immanent appropriateness, which is similar to a germinating seed.

This exhibition cycle finished with a sophisticated author's project by D.vOreshnikov Zero Stamp. Reference to the zero aesthetics of Eastern tradition and to the imperatives of avant-garde at the beginning of our century, to minimalism of the 1950s-60s and to the emptiness of post-structuralism had been skillfully carried off the game with relieves: white on white, white on transparent, and a set-up of a type of "ready-made" - dead bird on crumpled paper covered with photos of a dead bird on crumpled paper with strong and light collages from feather and eggs, which hatched from the sheet of paper.

The last two exhibitions, in fact, achieved the Center's objectives and tasks, in particular, the struggle against entropy, which had been set up in December 1993. The excursions at the Tirs gallery became regular. The press and broad sectors of the population have practically stopped laughing or reacting to the terms. Opponents, from the supporters of traditionalism or so-called positive aesthetics else high spirituality, began to show their respect towards their adversaries, calling them satanic or demonic. It was now viewed seriously without the earlier disrespect.

In a word, the experience had to be complete. A terminator (unction) was fulfilled by the House of Folk Art, the belly of which did not withstand the weight of the spreading new art.

Oreshnikov's installation was dismantled early and was replaced by an exhibition of primitive folklore and works by Odesa folk artisans.

The unique exhibition experiment received respectable base: it emerged from the ground and returned there. But the ground is now well-fertilized. A new young growth is unavoidable.