

**Valentino Dimitrovski**

The Aspects of the Current Artistic  
"Scene"

[Art Magazine Golemoto Staklo, No. 4, Skopje 1996  
Translated by M. Hdžimitrova]

[2.131 words]

Macedonia



EUROPSKA PRIJESTOLNICA  
KULTURE



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.

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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](http://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.

## Valentino Dimitrovski

### The Aspects of the Current Artistic "Scene"

The way the idea of the genius man was related to the one that indisputably rules the samples in the Baroque is the same as the way the idea of the artist of the present (without the charismatic attribute) is reflected in his arrogating the samples of all the regions of the current civilization milieu. He takes them as samples-forms from an inexhaustible arsenal composed of the regions of reality and fiction. By crossing them into diverse paradigmatic combinations he confirms the generative eternity of the Language-World and of the art that cannot be an autonomous fiction anymore. The fantasy, the creative power understood in the modern sense as the criterion of the spiritual hierarchy used to place the artist and his work at a privileged distance from beyond the secular. Today the world is being opened before the quiet contemplation as an endless rebus of multi-layer inscriptions and crossings that provide for the expressive tissue of the artistic ambiance. The art simply cannot become equal to the world in that way. But the world is not what it used to be Real and consistent. It is experienced as an inexhaustible harmony, as a library that has lost its card file, where it is not that simple to classify its real-existential reference. With the act of introducing into the Book of the World, in the "immense library", the artistic engagement, taken as a statement, is captured by the World-Language. It is captured in the rhetoric folds, in the rules and figures imposed by the dictate of the statement. The opacity of the language substance, of the endless rebus net is excluding the danger of uttering something from beyond the statement, beyond the world. Their kinship is decreasing the power of the referral. The artistic engagement can only offer a few "problematic" expressions, thus increasing the mess that has already escaped the control of the conscientious classifiers-keepers of the Reality of the autonomous artistic sense. The modern spiritual hierarchy in the last decades of this ultra-modern century is irretrievably being ruined towards the rebus syntagm of the language codes, where an allegoric impulse of

inexhaustible replacements and speakings reigns and which cannot be stopped into a self-content, identical and presentable sense of the meaning.

If the present artistic scene on the world is broken up, adding to the post-modernistic dissipation, than the situation, obviously, cannot be much different in this ambiance of ours, where the echo of the events is not being comprehended through, a prepared and appropriate articulation but rather incidentally, as a reaction to the individual requests. In the milieu of the numerous conceptualizations and equal openings towards the artistic and non-artistic impulses, the local scene lives in a state of disorientation. The phenomena of the fictionality and disillusioning, with the accompanying heterogeneous simulations, are increasing the paradoxicality of the artistic engagement, creating a fractal and vulnerable atmosphere where only individual "screams" and "fadings" thrive. The situation is neither apocalyptic nor lethargic, it is only chaotic and incidental, same as the beginnings of the unconventional engagement from the beginning of the 1990s. In order to supplement the impression, we must point out that the art of the 1990s, among the numerous solutions, however, founded its way over the neo-avant garde and conceptual artistic trends in the 1960s and 1970s. But, this does not refer to our scene. Such a practice never existed here (except for the "marginal" engagement of Sime Uzunovski in the 1970s with his poveristic subversiveness). So, the current scene is happily living its unrooted existence, related to the fluid "spirit of the time". From that point of view, however, we do not have a scene (more precisely, a macro-scene), but only a plenty of micro-scene survivals. If the present situation generally originates from the broadened concept of the artistic experience, soaked into the late-civilization linguistic universe, the elements of unrootedness, disorientation and simulation are not just an ambiental frame where the art is being practiced, but an immanent feature of the artistic engagement. Why, then, make an exception of our modest and quiet "scene"?

The decision to point out several names (B. Manevski, J. Šumkovski, Ž. Vangeli, I. Dimitrova, B. Blažeska - B. Grabuloski and A. Maznevski) is not a result of the intention to synthesize a micro-scene. This decision is a result of the feeling that it is impossible to avoid the personal choice and of the necessity to resist the increasing entropy and the sounds produced from our "scene". This choice is due to the recognizable presence and profile of the "concept" and to the relative equalization of the creations. On the other hand, not less motivating is the riddle of a certain language paradigm offered by the works of these artists: a partial forcing of the object and the actual, but amalgamated with a slight illusion and suggestion of an

aura<sup>1</sup>(some of Manevski`s works on his exhibition in 1995). The inclination towards creating a certain scenery-ambiance is obvious with most of these authors, although they offered various marks (especially Dimitrova, Vangeli, Blažeska - Grabuloski, and the others also, but in a rather particular way). A concealed, but inscribed, counterpoint of the primal, of the natural and the artificial (Blažeska - Grabuloski, Maznevski). A rhetoric of secrecy, mystic, but also of illumination, where the darkening of the performance is obligatory (Dimitrova, Blažeska - Grabuloski). Šumkovski, also, partly refers to this, when opening his expression for the paradigms of the technological and artistic feature in the "monumentalized" displays, installations (open or closed frieze made of equalized components in a calculated rhythm, which radiates with a certain aura). The ritualization of the procedure and almost mythical compulsion of the symbolical, the denoted (Dimitrova). Application of simple but signifying expression from the telematic milieu whose abundance and simulation is reduced by minimal conceptualization (Maznevski). "Playing" with the referent media and communication codes (Vangeli, Maznevski) and with the timeless archaic codes (Dimitrova).

The experiences that were the basis for the artistic language of Blagoja Manevski (mainly the works displayed at his exhibition in Skopje in 1995) are appearing on the horizon of the high modernism. But this does not refer to one of his emblem poetics or stylizations, but to the experience that forces him to apply a rigorous procedure and technically-formal fulfillment. There is something in these works that reminds in their diction of the British new sculpture from the 1980s (that was said to be deconstructing the metaphysics of the high modernistic sculpture). The works are radiating a kind of "artistic" fluid, released from narrative and symbolic, existential and ideological ballast. The creations are a combination of industrial materials and parts combined in unusual structures that are playing with the modernistic schematism. The removal of the expressive and communicative sediments is bringing these works closer to the cold objective ambiance of the art in the past few years. The emphasized impersonal diction is - the required and the calculated effect. It is followed by the strange titling that seems to be an integral part of the basic strangeness of the creation. And exactly on this level (the works look like extremely unusual and groundless "things") there seems to be appearing something personal, idiomatic. A certain mood of return to the curbed, to the personal that is nested into the

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<sup>1</sup> N. Vilić, Show versus Topic, The Large Glass, Skopje, 1995, br. 2 (Considering the works of the, so called, New Objective Art, Vilić says that "they do not hold reference towards the objective reality since they eliminate the difference between the illusion and the actual; they own the rationality in the process of construction; through the subjectiveness of the artistic process they fuse into the softness of the "craftsmanship" and then, by returning of the lost aureole-bearing attribute to the work of art, they are, finally, established within the coordinates of the artistic."

cold object schemes. That is how the basic double coding of current Manevski's works is inscribed, which later multiplies and vibrates in the aspects of the technological and artistic, natural and artificial... In the construction "Pantheon" (displayed on the exhibition *Image Box*) the technological, the telematic paradigm (a whole bunch of TV-sets), placed within an almost monumental scenery, is lucidly dethroned. Suggesting that the contemporary "Pantheon" might be the monument to the electronic image, Manevski ironizes its untouchable character. In the creation "Vada" (photographs), on the dried bottom of Debarsko Ezero (the Debar Lake) he installed a regular circular band, wiping out the traces of the process afterwards. The ground, the "basis" of the creation is imposing with its emptiness and primeness. The form of the circle is the emphasized secondary intervention. The "basis", as an intact nature, was intruded with an absolutely artificial form - the circle. The circle, with its totality and self-sufficiency (the traces of the performance would imply the negation of its totality) looks as if it is of itself, as if a natural phenomenon. But the geometrical regularity negates that particularity, the "naturalness". The creation vibrates in this double coding with a subtle inner pulsation. The works of Manevski are a silent witness of the art that lives through the disappearing of the Shape. They picture a scene of exponents without the exposed ones, a scene of complete fading of the referentiality and the rhetoric of the Secret.

In the beginning of the 1990s Šumkovski completed his statement on the echo of the mediated constructivist experiences, that appeared to be a kind of visualization and objectivization of the "sacred" and "profane". With a distinctive sensibility, with the softness of the "craftsmanship", he acquired the intimization of the three-dimensional compositions introduced in the works of the so-called New Objective Art<sup>2</sup>. But, by the half of the decade there was a certain declination from the sophisticated "Object" towards the opening of the space for the spirit of the current ambience-placing of the artistic practice. This was followed by the change of materials and the performing techniques and by the necessity for accented illumination and darkening the scene. The works (shown at *Image Box, 9 1/2: New Macedonian Art*, Skopje and *Balkan Art* in Novi Sad) are composed of serially connected equal elements. This "imposing" of the equal and the applied cold schematism as a technological component looks contrasted to the side lights that emphasize the artistic intervention, the texture of the exhibits or the polyester plates. The string weaving, the frieze, the multiplicative development of the texture of the plates and the "mystic"

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

impulses of the lights, together with the monumental scale of the whole display shine with a certain aureole of mysterious severity... expectation. The subtle game of the artistic and technological, of the "sacred" and "profane" is back again. But, now the rhetoric is different from that of the 1980s, it alludes to the underlying memory inscriptions.

With the metaphoric title "Porta" ("Gate") of the installation from 1994 in Skopje (Museum of Contemporary Art) Žaneta Vangeli suggests a direction, a "projection" towards the textual universe. With a monumental severity and with a kind of ascetic restraint she offered a frieze of dense metal inscriptions. This ideographic conciseness in a quiet and solemn procession discover their context: the so-called high culture and the mass-media. But its coding is not thematically-critically articulated, but in a flat counterpoint of the concepts that were equalized in the culture of the simulative abundance a long time ago: the high and the low, the elite and the marginal. An artistic practice, obviously distanced from the pathos of history and from the pathology of the social, although paradoxically, uses their "monumental" utterances, but within a rather uncorrelative ambiance of the personal expression. In the works shown at the exhibitions 9 1/2: The New Macedonian Art, Skopje, and on the Istanbul Biennial (1995) Vangeli pictures the "documented" vision - a portrait of the non-existing person Vladimir Antonov. The "documented" evidence, composed of many figures and disparate states, is playing with the personal, with the illusion of an authentic Identity. The incapability, the Nobody in the "portrait", is being dissolved into something eternal, but particular. There is irony in the fact that the "portrait", however, suggests a personality, it even has a name. In the installation on the Istanbul Biennial she utilizes the apophatic idea of the incapability of the positive, predicative determination of the essential. The immeasurability of the particularly expressed and supposed unity remains unuttered. The creations of Vangeli do not suggest pretentious messages or socio-cultural mobilization. They are satisfied with the hermetic state that establishes, separates and unites the levels of expression.

The basic component of the artistic language of Iskra Dimitrova is the articulation of the denoted, of the symbolic. That requires a process of strong and integral semantization<sup>3</sup>. The emission of the symbolic reformulates everything that is present in the creations: and that comprises not only materials and forms, or procedures and ambiances, but sound and tactile sensations, as well as the irritation of the senses of touch, smell...

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<sup>3</sup> L. Nedelkovska, "The other language" of Iskra Dimitrova, The Large Glass, Skopje, 1995, br. 3

The integrity of the denoting entity leads to a primitive universality, not acquired from a specific source but from the timeless universality of the "rite experiences", as the code of the archaic. The "ritual" performs a dedication of the space-ambiance, of the artifacts and the procedures in order to incarnate the mystery of the creation. Besides, the procession-procedure requires a certain time for its fulfillment. From the first half of the 1990s the "carrier" of the procedure of fulfillment is the fire and the performance-aimed presence of the artist (with her "ritual" escort). The rhetoric of the "sacred" experience requires three temporal, as well as denoting segments: the initiatory beginning, the culmination-ecstasy and the ending-fading. In these works, the semantic processing of the elements is in correlation with the narrative model of expression. But, in the second half of the decade, an operation of reducing, flattening of the rhetoric, ambiental and narrative impulses occurs. In "Lapis" (9 1/2: New Macedonian Art) and "Thalamos" (Čifte Amam 2) the previous expressive scheme is simplified to a purified and darkened ambiance where only the primary shape with an inside light is emphasized. In Thalamos we seem to witness a petrified-crystallized ritual where only the endless pulsing of the primary remained. But, the pulsing stylized antropomorph shape disintegrates in time: its cover dries up and the interior appears uncovered. We are facing a the mystery, but is it the mystery of creation or of the death? The declining towards the simplification of the elements of the expression in these works of Dimitrova influences the general flattening of the referentiality.

The artistic practice of Blažeska - Grabuloski, referred to their latest series of works, shows two important moments: the release of sound from certain natural materials acquired by breaking, sawing or cutting them, and the computer processing of the soundtrack in segmented and rhythmic passages. This processing of the primary sound to the secondary electronic editing (or, as the artists called it: plastic or artistic processing) is always performed in different ambiances. The ambiance displays, with their sophisticated and mysterious light illumination, bear something secret, light and transparent. But, heavy and irritating sound is produced against it, whose rhythm and stressed amplitudes, with the top of their strength, act deliberately towards shaking and destructing. The "ritual" diction of the destructing secondary ("electronic") soundtrack seems to offer a mood for "releasing" of the petrified "harmonies". The persistent repeatedness of the technological sound against the buried, condensed sound in the silence of the nature and the object. The concealed opening, crack, discontinuity in this duality brings us closer to the junctures, and somehow, to the abysses as well, where the natural and the



civilization edges meet. The artistic practice of Antoni Maznevski is a kind of fascination by the phenomenon of endless repetition, of petrified abstraction on the screen. In his works the electronic paradigm is reduced to an essence that is freed from the rhetoric and narrative themes of the emptiness and the impersonality of the inexpressive. In the irretrievable fading of the aural impulses of the expression, in the merciless wiping of the mysterious, appears the empty space on the screen. The screen as a petrified monument. In the installation *The End* (Museum of Contemporary Art, Skopje, 1966) Maznevski abandons the last "carrier", retaining only the elementary expression - The End - and its lexical explanation. The minimal density of the expression is suggested by the zero point of the sign-meaning. But the way he chooses to place the expression in the space (with a certain monumental severity), as well as the issue of its origin, seems to allow it to become a scene of numerous inscriptions. It is his abstract minimality in the offered scenery that makes him liable for an avalanche of codings and denotings of the endless games in the end. And, again, without the possibility to establish any dominant referential frame.