

**Press Release**

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**ARTISTS SPACE**

**November 12, 2004—January 8, 2005**

**Opening reception November 11, 2004 6 to 8 pm**

**Closed November 25, 26, 27, 2004, and December 23, 2004 through January 3, 2005**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**MAIN SPACE: *Flipside***

Cristian Alexa, Association Apsolutno, Art Attack, Maja Bajević, Emese Benczúr, Cabinet Magazine, Danica Dakić, Milena Dopitová, Vadim Fishkin, Jarosław Fliciniński, Tomislav Gotovac, Pravdoliub Ivanov, Joan Jonas, Kai Kaljo, Charles Krafft, Pawel Kruk, Julia Kunin, Yuri Leiderman, Antoni Maznevski, Audrius Novickas, Odili Donald Odita, Tony Oursler, Anthony and Katya Pemberton, Dan Perjovschi, Igor Savchenko, Tomo Savić-Gecan, Stephen Shanabrook, Škart, Sandra Sterle, Audrius Stonys, Eric Triantafyllou and Csilla Kosa, Aleksandar Zograf. Curated by Katherine Carl

What characterizes post-utopian art? Is it a genre of pure pragmatism or does it contain shards of the discarded vision from which it emerged? Is it the imagining of a new utopia: even the flipside of the old one? The exhibition *Flipside* represents a cross-pollination and exchange, traversing the horizon of separate utopian totalities of East and West. Artistic engagement with ideology and humanistic issues through conceptual means rather than response-based political art is a special hallmark of work throughout Eastern Europe today. Furthermore, widely differing art-historical and political conditions surrounding the basis and trajectories of art since the 1960s complicate fruitfully the Western canonization of these practices. *Flipside* brings together works by artists from post-socialist countries of Eastern Europe and their counterparts in the US who have participated in the cultural exchange program ArtsLink. Coupling local knowledge and international expertise, ArtsLink partnered with the network of Soros Centers for Contemporary Art in the main cities of every Eastern European country to be a significant catalyst of new critical and alternative practices in contemporary art.

The artists in *Flipside* create conceptual art that makes a strong sensory impact. As the artists investigate the human investment in systems of belief and the effect on the individual, many of the works in *Flipside* convey a sense of unsettledness through absurd dark humor or distortion of audio and also visual forms. Macedonian artist Antoni Maznevski's *A Se Esse* (1998) is a mechanism that has been transformed into a functionless object, a very sleek artwork. The work defies visual understanding when it is

rendered in photographs. It is so convincing in this medium as a figment of the imagination that it is often mistaken as a digital manipulation, but the work is a manual manipulation. The sculpture is a car, actually the back halves of two Volkswagen Bugs that the artist severed in half and joined. They form an unsettling twinned whole. The resulting crafted object continues an underlying theme of muteness or hermetic quietude relayed by his other sculptures, drawings and installations.

The Serbian collective skart's small stickers, buttons and flags printed with the emblem *Your Shit Your Responsibility* calls each of us to examine our real-life actions and their ramifications. Yet "your shit" is a semantic shifter that smoothly becomes "our shit." The design follows seamlessly: buttons can be worn by you, me, and read interchangeably by all of us as the subject of the message. Stickers that were placed in Belgrade, now will spring up in New York city streets. Where and to whom is responsibility to be affixed?

Croatian artist Tomo Savić-Gecan's new work for *Flipside* continues his interest in the displaced impact of human actions, including communication, and how this very subtly reveals ideological systems at work. A motion detector senses the movement of visitors in a gallery in Los Angeles and via internet line communicates this information to a specific location in Bitola, Macedonia, thereby affecting the functioning of a public streetlamp in the city. Calling into question the limits of contemporary art practice, he often displaces the time and space of production and reception through modes of communication, engaging the usual players in the art production system in unexpected roles. The wall label at Artists Space is the only physical instantiation of the artwork. In a happy accident, reflected light from architect Odile Decq's special project for Artists Space washes over the label in periodically changing shapes, continuing the unexpected trajectory of interaction in Savić-Gecan's work.

Hungarian artist Emese Benczur marks time with tactility through her manipulation of diverse materials. In her installation in *Flipside*, throwaway toys from the Budapest Chinatown intertwined with tiny colored lights form the words *Get Far* across the wall. Her work reflects on the disparities in time it takes to produce the physical work herself by hand in relation to the time of the industrial production and individual intimate consumption. As if testing the give of different fabrics, she points to these mediating effects that pull and bunch our experience of time.

Both Nigerian-American artist Odili Donald Odita and Polish painter Jaroslaw Fliciński manipulate the vocabulary of non-figurative abstraction with an idiosyncrasy that challenges the utopian goals for totality of American abstract and geometric painting. Fliciński's flat canvases employ a strict vocabulary systematically corrupted by the color and vigor of a pop-inspired op art. Odita continually forgoes the grid in favor of diagonally-skewed horizontal bands mainly of secondary and tertiary colors. They both work with the canonical style of abstraction that has been historically constructed as the domain of white, western, heterosexual men in the United States. It is widely known that this genre of painting was exported officially during the Cold War to propagate US culture—high culture to augment the popular Hollywood films that were distributed throughout the East.

Croatian artist Tomislav Gotovac, now 67, has been a pioneering performance artist, actor and filmmaker since the 1960s. His oeuvre is diverse in media but consistent in the use of his own body as a physical and symbolic presence of protest against ideological control and censorship. In 2002 in the fourteen-photograph series *Foxy Mister*, Gotovac contorts his aging naked body into the poses usually performed by young women in soft-core porno magazines. Through his avid interest over the decades in American popular culture, jazz and big band music, and Hollywood films, Gotovac knows the power that popular culture holds in creating stereotypes and manipulating belief. He also knows that desire never grows old.

Through her performances and videos Croatian artist Sandra Sterle consistently imagines fascinating characters that bear a combination of alluring and disturbing traits. In *La Casa* (2003), Sterle prys open the psyche of her character devolving into madness because the landscape around her, her own home, is being mutilated and distorted. Sterle's red masked character simultaneously is losing recognition of herself; her mind, body and bearings are slipping, suffering from the lack of a proper place for the body.

American artist Cristian Alexa's video *Ten-Second Couples* (2000) alludes to the investments that we make in other people, even unconsciously, each day. The familiarity of the view may even go unnoticed to New Yorkers: walking down the street amidst a slow motion stream of thoughts and visual input, vaguely registering a blonde woman in a white coat, then realizing that she takes the hand of a fellow sidewalk-traveler only to let it drop in a matter of seconds to take up with another. Alexa continually probes the meaning of everyday time, how we use it, fill it, what we extract from it, and with whom we spend it.

Lithuanian filmmaker Audrius Stonys' luxuriously slow-moving films portray small scenes of life on a large, but visually quiet scale. The girl's story in his film *Alone* (2001) is only glimpsed, never fully revealed, maintaining an air of fiction, though this is a documentary film of Stonys' father's volunteer work. He drives children who are alone, to visit their mothers in prison.

In the video *Women at Work 3—Washing Up* (2001) Bosnian artist Maja Bajević and two women displaced in the massacre of Srebrenica performed in a hammam in Istanbul. Over several days they washed cloths embroidered with slogans from the era of Yugoslavia, scrubbing them further into ruin as the water became dirtier and dirtier. The words of Tito that once had been so clear and strong, "Long live the armed brotherhood and unity of our nations!" were disintegrating. Bajević enacts the degradation of human investment and ultimate loss of belief in the system, whether it was a system built of propaganda and dictatorship or of bold ideals and utopia.

Dan Perjovschi unleashes the id that is ironically the voice of pure reason, exposing the raw limits of reality that fall short of humane expectations. Perjovschi criticizes political, cultural, and social regimes in his plainspoken vivacious line drawings with abrupt combinations of phrases and wordplays. Even more importantly, his observations point

out expectations and hopes of everyday citizens that, in many instances, inadvertently supplant the system of power. For *Flipside*, Perjovschi will make a series of new drawings commenting on current international politics, which he will contribute by fax from various cities in Europe where he is working during the time of the exhibition.

Serbian artists Association Apsolutno recoup an aoristic relationship to history that explores the unfolding of acts not in a linear form but across horizons of time. The video installation *a.trophy* enacts the stretching slippage of temporality by reworking a brief sequence in the film *The Last Oasis*, shot in the early 1980s in the former Yugoslavia, into a barely-moving 55-minute image of the moment when a deer sheds its antlers. Soon after the death of leader Josip Broz Tito in 1980, the country withered, along with its ideals of unity. The oasis was destroyed and now is a trophy of nostalgic history.

The ubiquitous presence of gun violence and its mythology is the impetus for *Traveling Bullet* (2004), a collaborative venture created for *Flipside* by Vadim Fishkin, based in Slovenia, Russian artist Yuri Leiderman and American artist Stephen Shanabrook. Leiderman has been haunted for some time by revulsion to the images and political rhetoric from the “wars of his childhood” including Vietnam. During the opening evening, the three artists assumed the personas of people who exist most dynamically in westerners’ imagination. Three mujahadin rested on rugs and car mats in the gallery space drinking tea and looking at slides of Cologne, Leiderman’s newly attained home after years of envisioning moving to the West. After the mujahadin vanished, three enormous brightly-colored playful serpents remain in their place in the exhibition space. Stephen Shanabrook continues to explore the unsavory nature of violence through his use of chocolate—a substance that entices and repulses. Resembling oil or blood, the liquid oozes unnervingly from a wall outlet, like a wound. The space is adorned by wallpaper and blinds in patterns perforated by a shotgun. Vadim Fishkin’s artworks involve science and technology to illuminate and imagine the invisible systems at work in the world. Fishkin’s traveling bullets are drops of water being released from above the exhibition space according to the command of an electronic voice reading out mathematical equations: the words “two plus two” yield four drops of water. Fishkin plays on what we invest with belief in intelligence and our expectations in the solidity of science. Fishkin also presents many small black and white drawings of the many combinations of a simple line and circular form into various landscapes, or fertile ground one might say. These are accompanied in an installation with two serpentine microphone-like light bulbs that speak to each other indecipherably of imagined lands found only in literature, films, and artworks. *Traveling Bullet* interprets and manipulates representations of bullets as messengers of violence and stereotypes of virility with more than a touch of playfulness.

The mechanical voices of Fishkin’s work are joined by Tony Oursler’s doll in *Spectrum* (1999), which recounts the colors of the rainbow in Polish. The doll both interprets and interferes with the message that is then made doubly unintelligible to American audiences. *Spectrum* is one of Oursler’s trademark video projections animating a simple sphere into the face of a foreign being with volition, id and demands. At issue here are the workings of perception and the mediation of words and images through technology, emotion or artistry.

Artist Igor Savchenko from Belarus was listening to shortwave radio one day in Sweden and mistakenly intercepted a coded signal, a long series of numbers read out vocally. This data transmission erupted like a relic from the era of spies and encryptions into the present moment, being broadcast live from the past. Throughout his career Savchenko has examined the remnants of history and their contemporary presence. Nearly 1000 hours of recordings and printed (but not decoded) transcripts of the signals that he picked up compose *A Small Research on Contemporary Coded Radio Transmissions* (1999).

Lithuanian artist Audrius Novickas provides a glimpse of the viewpoints that were previously off-limits during the era of Soviet control over the Baltic States. His series of photographs, *Power Views* (2001), were shot from the desks of the Prime Minister, Chairman of Parliament and the President. The questions they raise are not so much what do these images reveal, but what did we want them to reveal, and why did we create so much mystery about these outlooks? Why did they gain so much power? Now that we can occupy the other's seat, see the world from their side, it is revealed that the flipside is inside our individual and collective investments, with all of their horizons and discrepancies.