



Metaphysical Visions
MIDDLE EUROPE

Deconstruction, Quotation & Subversion
VIDEO FROM YUGOSLAVIA

May 25 - July 1, 1989
A R T I S T S S P A C E

Acknowledgements

I am delighted Artists Space is presenting *Metaphysical Visions: Middle Europe* which contains the work of artists from Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, and Yugoslavia. The exhibition comes at a time when the Western art world is slowly and belatedly beginning to turn its attention to art being produced outside mainstream European countries. The artists from these countries are seldom, if ever, included in international museum exhibitions or gallery shows in this country, and yet their work eludes classification as specifically political or regional in terms of any preconceived notions of national identity. I am also delighted that as a complement to the exhibition of visual art, Artists Space is presenting *Deconstruction, Quotation and Subversion: Video from Yugoslavia*, a survey of video art produced in Yugoslavia over the last five years.

I would like to note the use of the description "Middle Europe" for the countries we more commonly call "Eastern Europe." The notions of "East" and "West" carry many political messages and when we look at a map of the continent, we see that these countries fall in the center, between Russia in the east, and the countries we commonly think of when we in America say Europe. The countries of Central Europe do not think of themselves as apart from Europe, nor on its fringe, and therefore a more accurate nomenclature seems appropriate. The preference for "middle" over "central," is a means of referring to a growing, if controversial, concept in literature and criticism, *Mittleuropa*, a theory which finds a coherence in Central European culture. This theory substantiates a separation which is emancipatory with regards to Russian, Soviet or "Eastern" culture. For these reasons, we have chosen to avoid the term "Eastern Europe" in the writings about this exhibition.

There are many people whose participation has been invaluable throughout this ambi-

tious project. Charlotta Kotik, Curator at the Brooklyn Museum, was a partner in the project from the beginning and was helpful early on as a liaison with Czechoslovakia, and later with translation for this publication. Through her we came to know Wendy Luers whose enthusiasm and valuable advice I deeply appreciate.

I would like to thank Kathy Rae Huffman, Video Curator at the Institute for Contemporary Art in Boston, who organized the video program and outlines in her introduction some important thoughts about video production in Yugoslavia. Also I am grateful to Biljana Tomić, of the Student Cultural Center in Ljubljana, who was so enthusiastic early on for a video program to accompany the visual art and who has contributed an insightful essay to accompany *Deconstruction, Quotation and Subversion: Video from Yugoslavia*.

This program was organized with the generous assistance of Marina Gržinić, an independent curator and artist from Ljubljana, who arranged for Kathy Rae Huffman to visit Yugoslavia in March 1989, providing the timely opportunity to organize this program. For their generous contributions and assistance to the realization of this video program, Ms. Huffman also wishes to express her sincere thanks to Dunja Blažević, Culture Program, Belgrade TV; Andrej Drupal and Igor Berginic, Cankarjev dom, Ljubljana; Sanja Haveric, Video Susreti '89; Judith Buncher, American Center, Ljubljana; Marc Smith, The American Center, Zagreb; Marjan Susovski and Branka Stipanac, Galerija suvremene umjetnosti, Zagreb; and to The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston.

I am extremely grateful to the Open Society Fund which supported *Metaphysical Visions: Middle Europe* with a generous grant early in its planning stages, ensuring its realization. Thanks are also due to Susan Soros. Generous support came from the Alfred Jurzykowski Foundation for the Polish artists and their work. The National Endowment

for the Arts provided support for both the video and visual art exhibitions. The video exhibition is also supported in part by the New York State Council on the Arts.

On our own staff, I would like to commend Andy Spence for miraculously making sense out of a shipping situation which was, at best, chaotic, and Connie Butler who coordinated the innumerable and arcane details which made this exhibition such a challenge. Thanks are also due to Dan Walworth who, as always, sifted through myriad minutiae to make it all happen.

Finally I would like to thank former Artists Space Curator Valerie Smith who deserves our congratulations for the realization of this three year long project, as the culmination of her tenure at Artists Space. It was her interest and enthusiasm in this exhibition which sparked all of us at Artists Space to reach a better understanding of the art production in an overlooked region of Europe. The result is a diverse and exciting body of work and I am grateful to Valerie for introducing these artists to Artists Space and to each and every one of them for making it such a pleasure to share their work.

Susan Wyatt
Executive Director

Metaphysical Visions MIDDLE EUROPE

Metaphysical Visions: Middle Europe has been almost three years in the making. I began thinking about Middle Europe partially because of my friendship with the artist Bolek Greczynski and because of the history of my neighborhood on New York's Lower East Side. Finally the idea began to germinate after a trip to Prague and Budapest in 1983.

To prepare for the exhibition, I made at least two or three visits to each country, but it was here in New York that I was fortunate enough to meet Milada Šlizińska, without whom the Polish part of the show would not have been possible. My biggest thanks goes to Milada and her husband Jósek Mrozek, who took me in like family, took care of me, showed me every nook and cranny of the Polish art world, were fantastic teachers of Polish art history and, above all, a sounding board for all the strange ideas and questions I had about the art scene in that country. Milada and Jósek introduced me to many people: Jarek Jedlinski in Łódź was supportive early in the project and especially helped me with my initial Czech research. Anda Rottenberg and Grzegorz Kowalski and others too numerous to list here, who, through our various discussions, helped me define what I wanted and what was possible.

With regards to Czechoslovakia I would like to thank Charlotta Kotik for confirming many of the names I had initially

received from Jarek, for her interest in the project from the beginning and her concrete support in translating the Czech texts. In Prague I spoke to many people who helped me in the process of defining and refining the exhibition. They are: the late Francesek Šmejkal, who first introduced me to a group of young artists, the *Tvrdohlaví (Hard Heads)*. In addition I spoke with Jirí Setlik, Jirí Valoch, Ludvík Hlavacek, Jana Sevcikova and Jirí Ševčík, and finally the artists and friends of artists Tomáš Ruller, Ivan Kafka, Margita Titlová, Vladimír Merta, Antonín Sřížek and his wife, Václav Marhoul and Sova Kovanova all of whom gave me their interpretations, thoughts, time, a meal, or a place to sleep. To all of them I will be forever grateful.

In Yugoslavia my thanks go to Ješa Denegri in Belgrade and Andrej Veljkovic in New York, who helped narrow my initial list of artists. My biggest thanks goes to Lidija Merenik, who introduced me to many artists, and especially Biljana Tomić, who organized my second visit to Belgrade and my trip to Zagreb, and who helped to facilitate the video program which accompanies this show.

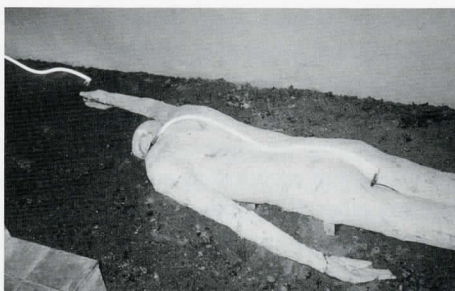
In Hungary thanks go to Orshi Drozdik, who was instrumental providing contacts in New York. Once there, Beke Laşzló, Paternák Miklós, Feuer Gábor helped me with their invaluable time and information

about the art scene in Budapest. Special appreciation goes to Yvonne Bárdki, who introduced me to the first artists I met in Budapest and interpreted in French, the ideas of artists who spoke only Hungarian. My deepest thanks go to Suzy Mészöly, who cut through the snags, organized very quickly a full program of studio visits, and showed me the younger Budapest art scene.

Finally I would like to thank all the artists who participated in this exhibition: from Warsaw, Mirosław Bałka; from Łódź, Mariusz Kruk and Piotr Kurka; from Prague, Jirí David and Jirí Kovanda; from Budapest, El Kazovszkij; from Belgrade, Mrđjan Bajić, and from Zagreb, Željko Kipke, their enthusiasm and wonderful work has finally metamorphosed this exhibition from a vague idea into a reality.

Valerie Smith

Above, left and right: Mirosław Bałka,
River, 1989



Metaphysical Visions of Middle Europe

The American mind on Middle European affairs has, until recently, almost exclusively led to thoughts about oppression and political struggle. It follows therefore, that in an American organized exhibition involving artists from what is more politically and geographically correct to call Central or Middle Europe, one could expect and even want, to find art that reflects all our received ideas and acquired political biases about these countries. To show political art would justify and continue to perpetuate the American view that socialism is a myth, codifying Middle Europe in a nice, neat political package for Western consumption. Predominant in recent conversations I had in the four countries I visited while organizing this exhibition, was the view that political art is considered just another form of oppressive political ideology. Political activities are often laughed at by other members of the art community and have been, unfortunately, ineffective towards real, collective change. A major ideological contradiction noted by sceptics is the rampant sexism among such political art groups. Despite these denials, the significance of these political art groups and organizations who openly express their opposition to the government while often risking their livelihood, cannot be underestimated. Briefly outlining the inherent problems can only give a small taste of some of the issues. No matter how relevant to a current and comprehensive picture (which was not the intention of this exhibition) the work of such groups as *Inconnu (Unknown)* and *Hejettes Szomjazók (Second Class People are Thirsty)* in Budapest, or the *Orange Alternative* in Wrocław, is not included here because doing justice to the ideological thicket and problems raised by both these groups and other non-partisan artists, is the subject of another exhibition.

Mirosław Bałka, Mrđjan Bajčić, Jirí David, El Kazovszkij, Željko Kipke, Jirí Kovanda, Piotr

Kurka, and Mariusz Kruk deliberately avoid overt political references, however the existential questions they pose attempt to reposition their work not only in relation to the rest of Europe, but globally. This desire to be identified and accepted as an artist working like any other, European or American, is one of the single most important priorities defined by this exhibition. This work and the issues it raises, such as questions about human existence, the anthropomorphism of the inanimate, redefining visual history, come first, not notions of nationality. Even in the paintings of Jirí David, where the country of Czechoslovakia and the city of Prague are primary, these representations become subjective. Ultimately the specificity of the iconography transcends national borders and enters a universal language.

It would have been easier to organize an exhibition of contemporary art from one country, but this was not an acceptable option for many reasons; in particular, such a decision would have continued to promote the idea of a national identity. During the late seventies and early eighties, shows of this type were partly designed to derail an American and Euro-centric view of art. An exhibition involving several very different Central European countries already begins to change preconceptions, such as the notion of a Central European "type," the idea that all artists from Central Europe use "poor" materials, or that all art from Central Europe must be political, etc. It is surprising the extent to which prejudice, especially among the "Western" European art community, exists concerning the issue of "quality" in the art of Central Europe. Consistently, important Central European contributions to art have been neglected, such as the Yugoslavian Constructivist magazine *Zenit* or the work of Henryk Stazewski in Poland and Władysław Strzemiński. It is also astonishing to witness the lack of representation these countries have had in major international conferences and exhibitions on contemporary art.

In order to be exactly representative of Middle Europe, this exhibition should also include work from East Germany, Austria, Rumania, Bulgaria, Albania, and Greece. Time limitations forced the most obvious and natural choices: Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Yugoslavia. The associations between the work in the show ultimately results in a surprising affinity for subjectivity, the body, theater and cultural signs. These similarities are ironic, because cultural and aesthetic differences between neighboring countries are often a point of pride, an attitude which promises to change in a positive way. These differences have been partially attributable to the fact that there is very little lateral communication between these countries. Contact is especially lacking between Poland and Czechoslovakia where, for the most part, the latter's fear of the former's radical politics has prevented cultural exchange. Hungary and to some extent Yugoslavia could be seen as more fortunate because of their relative proximity to the West, for example through the Budapest-Vienna corridor.

Conversely, this exhibition could also be criticised for focusing exclusively on Middle Europe without the participation of American and other European artists. But this reflects an original concept, now two or three years old. Perhaps the public is only now prepared for a more complete and heterogeneous view of international art; this exhibition can only be considered as part of a process which breaks down cultural barriers toward a more representative picture. The next step should depart from the familiar relationships with new moves towards integration and education, along with an investment of real politics into contemporary international exhibitions. Sadly up to now, a broader and inclusive scope has not existed, even for those institutions which claim to be open.

Taking into consideration a few exceptions, which usually have a political focus,

collective artistic activity has unfortunately all but disappeared in the United States. Undoubtedly, the potentially non-commercial aspect of collective action has steered the “me” generation away from a practice we now associate with the alternative and utopic roots of the sixties. For these reasons it is intriguing that Mirosław Bałka, in partnership with Mirosław Filonik, founded the *Neue Беременность* group in Warsaw. *Neue* means new in German, and *Bierieminnost* means pregnancy in Russian: a “new pregnancy” that was conceived in Poland, a Poland squeezed between the dominance of German and Russian avant-garde aesthetics. Similarly, Mariusz Kruk and Piotr Kurka were involved with the Poznań based group *Koło Klipsa*. *Koło Klipsa*, founded in 1983, is loosely translated as the *Clip Circle* and is the collaborative activity of four or five members, whose team effort and discussions produce a body of work that defines a specific scheme for each individual installation. Kruk was the group’s leader and Kurka the founder, before they finally resigned after a disagreement with other group members. Occasionally working together, and often alone, their work has remained more poetic and raw, less homogeneous and polished than their colleagues in *Koło Klipsa*.

Kruk and Kurka’s objects are metaphysical, transcending their materiality to embody abstract configurations whose significance floats within the supernatural. Animals and figures are their stock repertoire, which metamorphose into other animals or lakes. Beds smoke like factories. The work is decidedly alchemical, and this is partly projected by the use of very basic materials such as wood, dirt, water and plants, which quickly shed their banality to embrace a strange spiritual life.

Kruk is a philosopher of sorts. In the same vein that fostered the original premise of *Koło Klipsa*, he advocates abandoning official definitions of things. His skepticism has led him to question received ideas about the

nature of objects. Believing in the power of invention (a lost art in the age of appropriation), Kruk has developed his own grammar of signs. It resembles a menagerie, in which a loose narrative releases a pathological atmosphere that is a living absurdity. The chaotic state of affairs in this realm results from his use of materials and the deliberately crude and jerry-rigged method in which his objects are constructed. Although the total situation Kruk portrays is serious when taken at face value, it also reveals something very laughable and pathetic.

Like all constructed mythologies, Kruk’s has a symbolic order. Each player participates in a world theater where it assumes the mask of the state, education, religion, or family. In each sculptural grouping a parable is being told as in the paintings of Bruegel and Bosch. The parables although typically unspecific, seem to pertain to skewed relationships between people and objects. The viewer has the sense that Kruk’s installations relate to an adult’s world told from a child’s point of view, a world incapable of maintaining order; yet a semblance of order without substance, exists nevertheless. This is the stuff of adult game playing.

Kurka’s work is philosophically close to Kruk’s. Pathos is the shining distinction in Kurka’s world, symbolically represented by the deep red cicatrix on the surface of his objects and animals. Ephemerality as a result of this ambiguous violence inflicted on the familiar, is the romantic and social condition which generates the work. Clearly this source of tension exists on an ontological level. Vulnerability is a condition of the abject and Kurka’s figures live horizontally near the ground, where humanity is traditionally at its basest point. Georges Bataille comes to mind, but Kurka’s representations are not specifically sexual and his figures are also physically fragmented, displaying a split between the intellect and the sensual body, which is antithetical to Bataille’s project. The

severity and acuteness of Kurka’s imagery begs pathologic associations. On the other hand, the speciousness of the wound or stigmata on the body seems to relate to ritualistic or sacrificial practices, of penitence and endurance. These spiritual references lend themselves to an explanation of nature as a means of healing, and healing through violence.

Mirosław Bałka’s installations also have a human presence, cast in plaster from a masculine form (his own?). They give a more solid and physical impression than Kruk or Kurka’s objects, which may have an oblique connection to Bałka’s theatrical actions. Displacing this sense of reality however, is the adoption of the traditional Christian posture of the Melancholic Christ or the Contemplative Christ. Here again, the themes of vulnerability, mortality, and psychological pain are pervasive. For these reasons Bałka’s concerns appear to revolve around the Lacanian model of the ‘real’, as the subject of his work seems to be perpetually waiting in a desirous, suffering state. This body wants, but never attains heaven; it longs for, but doesn’t find peace. This figure is bound to the earth, to the cycle of organic matter that grows, rots, and dies. The gravity of the situation, and the lowliness of the elements are also reminiscent of Bataille’s theories: a neon tube inserted into the figure’s anus wraps around its head and then is pulled, like a noose, by his outstretched hand. Is this the light of passion being strangled by reason? Or a struggle with faith in a psycho-sexual drama?

Along and powerful tradition of the individual exists in Europe. One has only to invoke the names of Franz Kafka and Karel Hasek to see how these writers have shaped Middle European Surrealism and its strong existential figurative bent. This link between figuration and the performances of the fifties and sixties, in which the body predominates, has also left its mark on contemporary art and in particular, the work of El Kazovszkij.

Like her Hungarian and Polish colleagues, the Russian born Kazovszkij does not limit her activities to a single medium. Her installations derive from her Fellini-esque performances, which combine the Greek tragic and Wagnerian operatic forms in a fantastic production about life, death and the rise and fall of civilization. Kazovszkij's installations of decapitated ballerinas, dogs bound and gagged, belong to her imaginary realm, directly projected by conflicting sexual identities: of a woman trapped in a patriarchal system, of the authority of the Father and the Mother, of the tension between heart and mind. The romantic side of Kazovszkij's personality, perpetuates an aura of bisexuality, using it as leverage against conventionalism, towards the production of a feminine mystique. Repeated images, in total chaotic excess, increase the overwhelming sense of oppression.

It is not coincidental that Kazovszkij shares her interest in the body and sexuality with Bařka as well as the Hungarian artists of her generation, such as Szirtes János, fe-Lugossy László, and before them Erdély Miklós and Bódy Gábor. However, as a woman artist working in Central Europe, her concerns are closer to that of women performance artists, such as Vlasta Delimar in Zagreb, whose imagery is explicitly about pain and pleasure within a woman's life cycle. In America, performance art quickly split off from mainstream artistic activity, becoming a separate genre divorced from object production. But in Europe, it is integrated and very much alive. It is considered by the authorities in some political cases as the most dissident art form. This is particularly true in Czechoslovakia, where restrictions are so great that artists such as Tomáš Ruller, are labeled subversive and have their passports confiscated because of the content of their work or the fact that they have performed in the nude.

On the other hand, painting, for the most part, is acceptable to the Czech government, so

long as the potential for revenue exists. In most Central European countries, the commercial galleries which do exist only support official touristic art. In Prague, the situation is worse; the few non-commercial spaces are usually state run, temporary, and subject to the whims of the government. This situation has forced artists to organize their own exhibitions in warehouses and civic centers, or wait until an opportunity occurs abroad. For many this opportunity never comes and, even when it does, it can be sabotaged. The irony is, that the myopia of Western tourists fosters a belief that the Czech government offers their citizens more domestic comforts than Poland or Yugoslavia. While this gloss of consumer possibilities may exist, it also sacrifices personal freedom, spontaneity, and choice.

Within these constraints, a loose and democratic group of artists, who call themselves the *Tvrdohlaví (Hard Heads)* have formed. The only criteria for inclusion is that every member must agree to accept each new applicant, a system which breeds diversity, growth and change. This revolutionary enclave has a mock "leader" (in real life a film producer), who organizes exhibitions and facilitates connections between people from "the outside" and emerging contemporary Czech artists.

One painter in this group, Jirí David, has had perhaps the most success in his country. David's work fascinates those in the Western art community whose general perception relates to a slightly skewed political romance (described earlier) regarding art from the "Eastern Europe." David's paintings and to a certain extent Jirí Kovanda's, have all the signs of art that addresses social issues. In fact, they toy with simulating social commentary. This double-edged operation plays an integral part in the Western acceptance of their work, which relates to our continuing fascination with representations of "Socialism."

David uses typical Czech imagery, the laurel leaf and other pieces of ornamentation, to signify national emblems. Often the outline of Czechoslovakia and the colors of the Czech flag are represented as well as signs for Czech products, set against a Czech landscape. In other paintings, the subject is a void of pale, thick, crackling paint, the kind one finds peeling in the stairwells of old apartment buildings. In Prague, and in most urban housing in the world, this faded color represents social neglect and apathy. David's paintings describe what he calls the "*totální distance v období sociální vybledlosti*" ("furthest extension in the era of social paleness"). However, these paintings are not particularly angry or representative of a fierce oppositional statement, rather they are simple metaphors about the way things are. Despite the fact that patriotism is not intended, in David's quixotic painterly style, a quiet, contemplative and almost nostalgic message is evoked.

Jirí Kovanda's current work derives from his background as a conceptual artist, but his paintings refuse the seriousness of that period in favor of a whimsical play of images, altogether different than David's relative minimalist, somber outlook. The viewer can identify Kovanda's conceptual roots, both formal and iconographic, in the network of advertising and art historical references, which perform like appropriations of appropriation. This practice is so reified in current Western culture, that its capacity for criticism has been rendered almost impotent. What is it doing here and to what purpose? How does one criticize a consumer society in a country where the consumer is nearly non-existent? What one Czech critic said about this work was that it was "export art" for the West: the attraction is contained in the appropriate mixture of irony and social satire, a language instantly familiar to most savvy metropolitans. But for Czechs, who recognize the Czech quotations, this type of communication is relatively novel and its rebellious voice still powerful.

Both David and Kovanda are among the few artists in Czechoslovakia who have ventured to apply the post-modern paradigm to an exclusively Czech end. For David, the importance of speaking directly about the Czech condition is paramount. Kovanda's methods obligingly take part in an international language, which signals the desire to dialogue in avant-garde myths. Kovanda's best work is when he leaves those all too familiar devices to those who perpetuate myths, and instead paints pictures of masks and strange faces that are not so easily decipherable.

As an artist and critic, who keeps his finger on the pulse of the European and, whenever possible, American art world, Željko Kipke is also involved in referencing art culture. While the content of his work may look like Picabia (an appropriation Kipke disparagingly claims no one recognizes in Yugoslavia), its meaning is in fact, more obtuse. Kipke's paintings are composed of a private world that operates by romantic and literary laws. As in much Polish contemporary art the theory of metaphysics also applies here. Kipke's paintings are essentially abstract, anamorphic explorations or visual distortions. He investigates the visually knowable and combines epistemic signs. Perhaps this is why Picabia is invoked, since he, as well as Duchamp and a number of Surrealist photographers and associates were involved with optical devices, designed to confuse the separation between knowable reality and illusion.

Digressing slightly, it is worth mentioning that the work of the Dalmatian born Vladimir Dodig-Trokut has held some special interest in Kipke's conceptual development. Trokut's life and art are contiguous and without going into a long story, it must suffice to mention that Trokut's activity, as collector and director of the Anti-Museum, enters deep in the heart of Yugoslavian culture as seen in its dependence on metaphysics, especially epistemology and cosmology. Trokut's work is summoned in this context for its relevance to Kipke's interest in alchemy and mysticism.

However, all the work in this exhibition, and much of the work in Middle Europe takes an alchemical or metaphysical approach to creativity. The use of Byzantine perspective and its reconstruction as a mystical visuality is particular to the work of Kipke and Mrđjan Bajić. The Byzantine device is a paradox of frontality and tilted perspective, an essentially Eastern and classical hybrid, that reveals the continuity between architectonic spaces and the human body. Kipke uses it in conjunction with a constructivist composition in the rustic colors of ruined frescoes. This is the realm of the underworld, formal and self-contained, protected fortified against reality and politics.

A fierce social independence is the consequence of Yugoslavia's composition from separate and various provinces. This independence has fostered very different approaches to artistic practice, which can be seen in the paintings of Kipke in Zagreb (Croatia) and the sculptures of Mrđjan Bajić in Belgrade (Slovenia). While they share an interest in Medieval architecture and Byzantine perspective, Kipke's paintings adhere to concrete procedures whereas Bajić's constructions are intuitive and organic. Kipke's explorations in semiotics and quasi-mystical, literary affectations could not be further from Bajić's insistence on the expressive physicality of the tactile object. Naturally it follows, that Kipke's program is devoid of figurative elements and the human body paramount in Bajić's work.

Bajić's heavy opaque constructions of lead, wood, glass and polyester resin are anthropomorphic; fluidly moving states, in part human, part shelter, part vehicular. The figure appears in architecture everywhere in Early Christian and Byzantine art so that it becomes identified with the surrounding edifice to the extent that they become synonymous. This uncanny amalgamation is immediately humorous and anxiety producing because of its excessive, mannerist quality,

and conjures up fictional characters such as satyrs, those Hellenistic stereotypes incarcerated in the bodies of beasts. Bajić pays tribute to the Neo-Classical period in Mannerist Europe which produced heads and limbs decoratively attached to a vast array of functional objects that honored the God to which each object was an attribute. From a more macabre perspective, Bajić's contemporary mythologies recall scenes from *A Clockwork Orange*, in which the protagonist finds himself in the hospital a victim of a political experiment and wakes up squealing in the body of a pig. The ghost of Mr. Husa returns.

In the sculptural work of Baška, Kruk, Kurka, and Bajić, the body is the site where history and society stake their claims. The expressive subject of their work is this staking, with both its Christian and pagan connotations. The body also becomes an empathetic code that the spectator instinctively inhabits, and once this identification is established the ontological variables that carry the narration unfold. These stories address complacency and doubt, facade and fragility, suffering and illusion, imprisonment and abandon, decadence and transformation. The accumulative and metamorphic attributes of the materials outline these paradoxical engagements and offer them as abstracts towards the development of a metaphysics in art. Kipke, David, and Kovanda bridge and complete the project of this work with very different approaches to the parameters of the known and knowable. Kipke questions the existence of place and language with his mystical propositions; David draws on reality to accept what is face value; and Kovanda asks that the familiar facts of quotidian life reveal their true worth as simple, fungible objects. As with anything that enters the public arena, the point is communication. What this group of artists convey is a belief in the visible signs of the human mind and body. These signs are the product of an artistic investigation in metaphysics.

Valerie Smith

MRDJAN BAJIĆ

Born in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, 1957

Lives in Belgrade

One Person Exhibitions

1984 Gallery of the Student Center,
Zagreb
Studio D, Ingrid Dacić, Tübingen,
Gallery OK, Rijeka

1986 Gallery Equrna, Ljubljana
Galerie Ingrid Dacić, Tübingen,

1987 Gallery of the Student Cultural
Center, Belgrade
Great Gallery of the Cultural
Center, Novi Sad

1988 Salon of the Museum of Modern
Art, Belgrade
Galerie Ingrid Dacić, Tübingen,

1989 Gallery of Contemporary Art,
Zagreb

Selected Group Exhibitions

1985 4, Salon of the Museum of Modern
Art, Belgrade

1986 *Lo Spazio: Belgrado*, Sala 1,
Rome
Mandelzoom, Canino
Junge Kunst aus Jugoslawien,
Künstlerhaus und Neue Galerie,
Graz

1987 *Yugoslav Documenta*, Collegium
Artisticum, Sarajevo

1988 Project, Gallery Olga Petrov,
Pančevo



Above:
Pustinja (Desert) 1986
iron, polyester resin, sand, terra-cotta
9 1/4 x 22 1/4 x 126 inches
Photo: D. Dangubić

Right:
Pokretno jezero (Moving lake) 1988
aluminum, polyester resin,
terra-cotta, wheels
25 x 39 x 19 1/2 inches
Photo: M. Maoduš





Hidrocentrala
(Hydroelectric Power-Plant) 1988
synthetic fur, aluminum, polyester resin
33 x 27 1/3 x 16 1/2 inches
Courtesy Galerie Ingrid Dacic', Tübingen
Photo: D. Dangubic'

These works are the expression of a belief that sculpture, as an internally destabilized object, can sway the stereotypical view of reality, in which the function of the object conditions a formed logic. In addition, sculpture's assignment is to attain the one and only meaning and, having objectivized a poetical, idealistic hypothesis, it can open a possibility for the Other.

The flesh of the sculpture is an encounter with materials rough and delicate, lasting, cold or fragile, which shine with their own meaning, and are then reformulated in relation to what is "shown": a bronze frozen in the state of melting, but also a house made of bronze; the beauty and radiance of poisonous polyester resin, but also clouds, water and breath - frozen in polyester; spools of copper "hair" as the best conductors in the transformer; and clay "the material for making people" surrounded by synthetic grass - the material used for parks in models.

Mrdjan Bajić
Belgrade, February 1989
translated by Ivan Vejvoda

MIROSLAW BAŁKA

Born in Warsaw, Poland, 1958

Lives in Otwock

One Person Exhibitions

1985 *Wolves, Non-Wolves*,
TPSP, Warsaw

1986 *Precepta patris mei servivi
semper*, with
Neue Беременность,
Pokaz Gallery, Warsaw

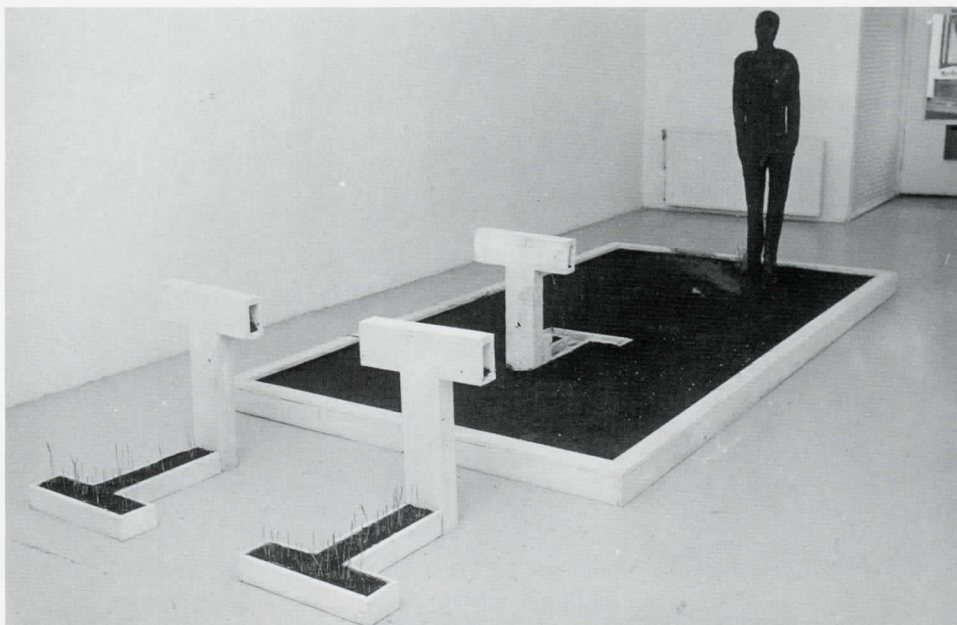
1989 *The River*, Labirynt 2 Gallery,
Lublin

Selected Group Exhibitions

1986 *Figures and Objects*,
BWA Gallery, Puławy
Expression of the 80s,
BWA Gallery, Sopot

1987 *II Biennale of New Art*,
Zielona Góra
What's Going On,
Department of the Museum of
Technology, former Norblin
Factory, Warsaw

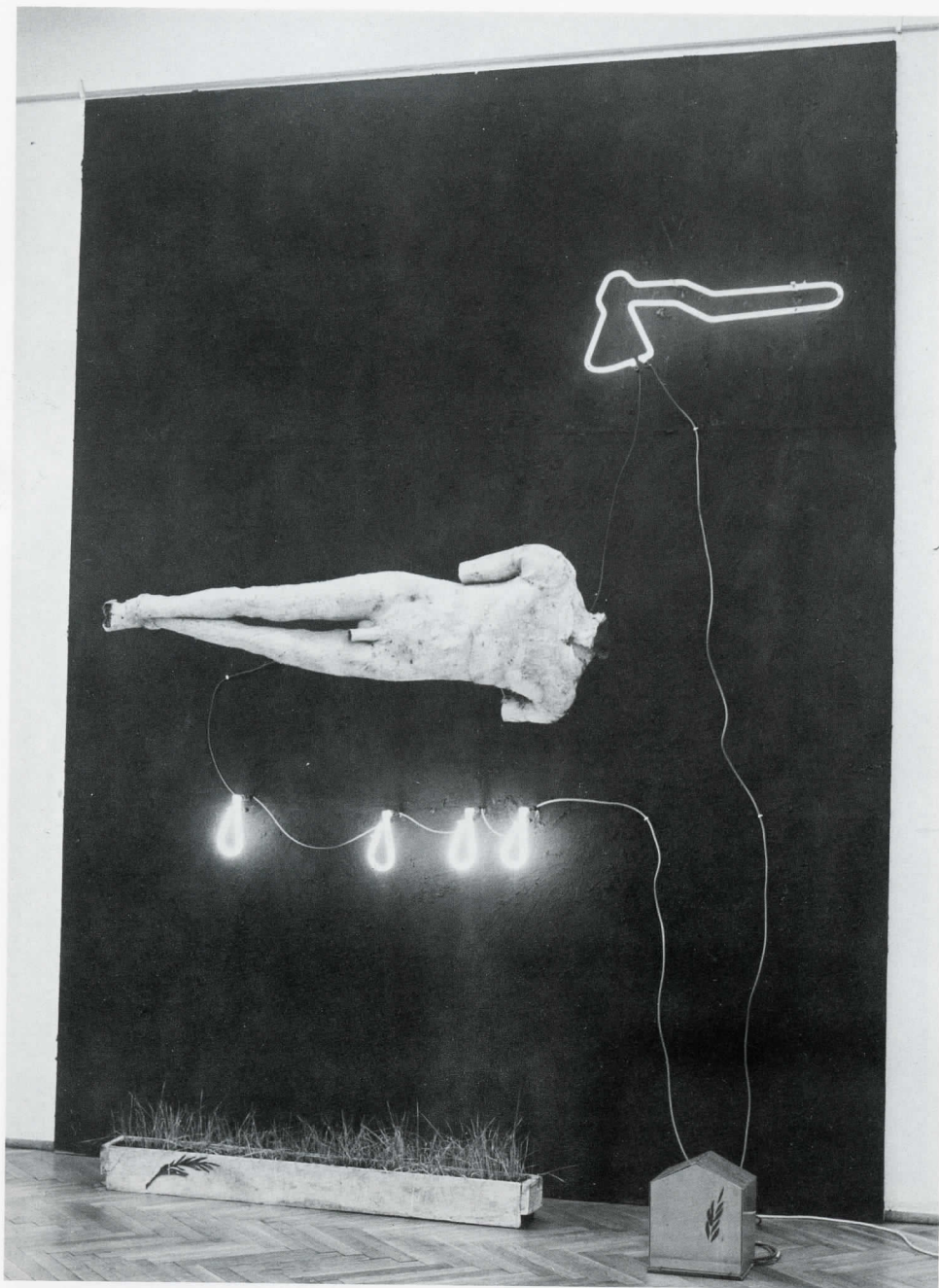
1988 *Sculpture in the Garden*,
SARP Garden, Warsaw
B.K.K., Haag Centrum
voor Aktuele Kunst, The Hague
Polish Realities, Third Eye Centre,
Glasgow



Above:
Sandpit 1988-89
wooden construction, painted jute, salt

Right:
John 15.6 1989
wooden construction, painted jute,
neon lights and transformer, ash
118 x 78 3/4 x 39 1/2 inches

Page 3:
The River 1988-89
wooden construction, painted jute, ash,
neon lights and transformer
275 1/2 x 118 x 39 1/2 inches



Sandpit (*la mort approvoisée*)

Summer holidays in the sixties I always spent in Otwock. Year by year in summer time I had only two attractions:

1st - The Swider River

2nd - The cemetery in O.

The river - because it was the nearest and the shallowest river.

The cemetery -

the reason for my frequent visits to that place was my late grandfather - Wiktor B. - monumental mason.

When my grandfather raised a new monument I always helped him. (At least once a week).

We drove to the cemetery in a cart full of pieces of a new monument.

It was an exciting ride.

The cemetery of my childhood welcomed me with shadows of pines.

The cemetery welcomed me with a smell of fresh cold soil.

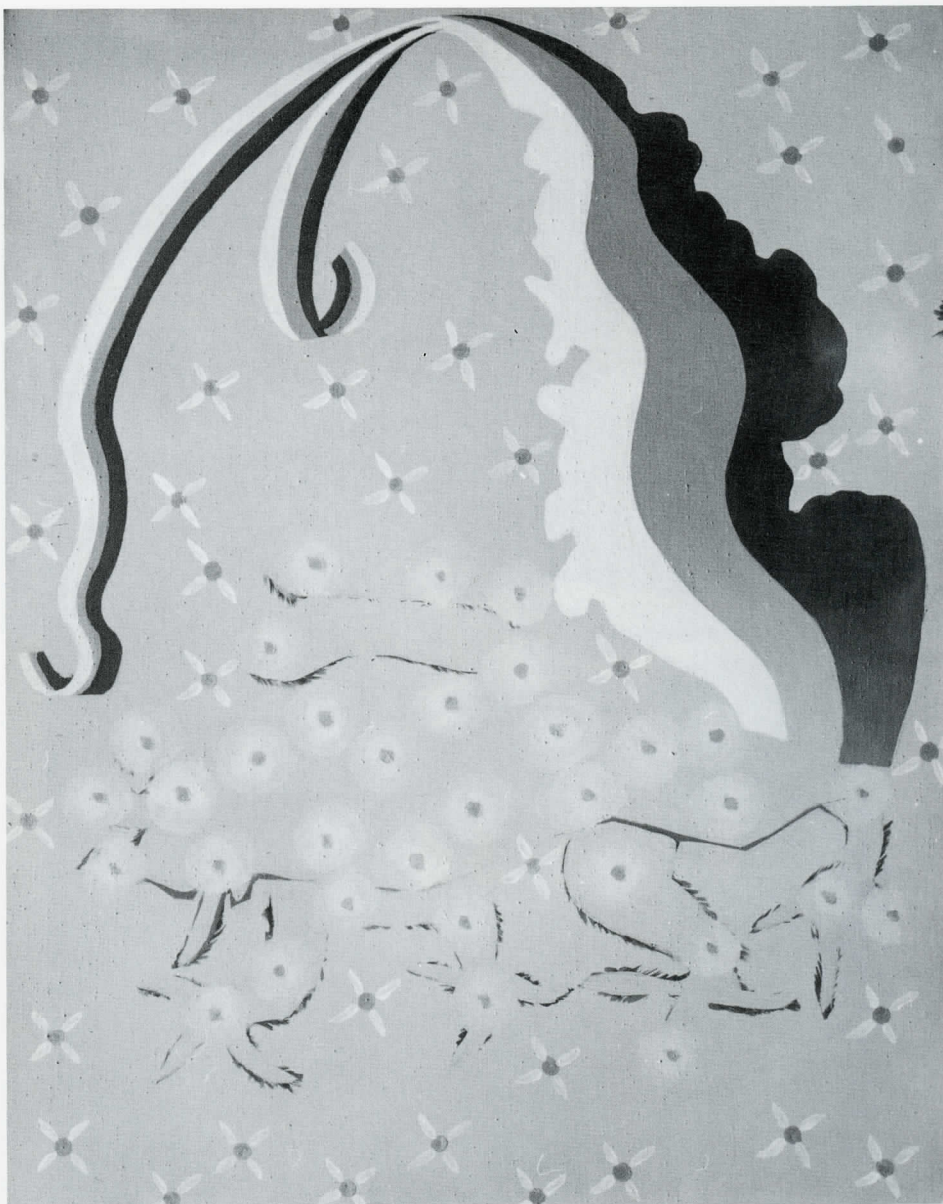
The cemetery waited for me like a big sandpit. (And no words about *Eros* and *Thanatos*).

Mirosław Bałka

The Hague, October 1988.

translated by Joanna Holzman

Czech Lion 1988
acrylic on canvas
15 3/4 x 23 1/3 inches



JÍRÍ DAVID

Born in Rumburk, Czechoslovakia, 1956
Lives in Prague

One Person Exhibitions

1987 Community House, Prague
Railway Workers, Prague
Third Eye Centre, Glasgow

1988 Aspex Gallery, Portsmouth
Riverside Studios, London

Selected Group Exhibitions

1988 *Hard Heads Group*, Prague
Exhibition of Fifteen, Prague,
Bratislava
Exhibition of Young Artists,
Moskva

1989 *Czech Art Today*,
Esslingen, West Germany



Left:
Prague III 1988
 acrylic and combine technique
 82 x 58 1/2 inches

Right:
On the Roses 1988
 acrylic on canvas
 82 x 60 1/2 inches

The following can be regarded today as meaningful: we must learn to produce bread from hunger and drink from thirst.

Reality as fragmentary objectivity is a realization of language as an essential ground for the formation of contradictions which thus remove the temptation to dismiss anything. What we at this moment understand as fragmentary objectivity has its source in space, which is infinite, removed from interpretation and, consequently, what we see in the form of fragments of an uncertain context, is already our own shape, since the certainty or original name has been forgotten.

Fragmentary objectivity corresponds to the total distance, which it further specifies: the form is objectivity, the content is objectivity, and objectivity is the collective cultural social surface of the generalized cognition. Objectivity is the meeting with the shattered model of reality, objectivity is the undistorted recording of reality, because objectivity

receives the concrete state without subsequent valuation. Fragmentary objectivity from the position of total distance doesn't invite anyone to attractive, adventurous, alluring excursions. It is nothing more than what it in itself presents. It is the plain recognition and acknowledgement of its origin.

Objectivity is the facade of any house
 Objectivity is the color of any house
 Objectivity is home
 Objectivity is Prague
 Objectivity is a drain cover
 Objectivity is a mat at the door of art
 Objectivity is a faded notice board
 Objectivity is a confession of the place of its purpose
 Objectivity is transformation of perishability
 Objectivity is without moral anxieties
 Objectivity is nearness without nearness
 Objectivity is the smell of moist stones
 Objectivity is the healed scars of language
 Objectivity is the ribbon on a wreath for any occasion
 Objectivity is at least three views at the same time

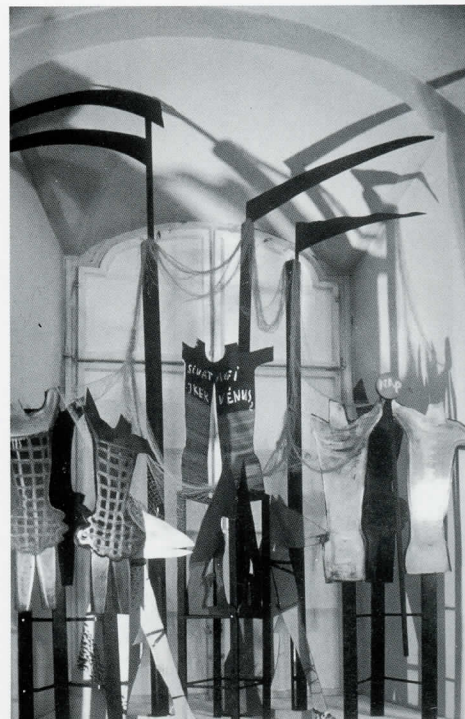
Objectivity is the collective consciousness uttered in fragments
 Objectivity is any show window
 Objectivity is any designation
 Objectivity is the totality of names with interrupted memory relations
 Objectivity is always now
 Objectivity is social discoloration
 Objectivity is total distance
 Objectivity is the possible expression in the zero situation
 Objectivity is unpleasant severity
 Objectivity is goose pimples on the body of art
 Objectivity is a muddled text being aware of being so
 Objectivity is an unclear photo in a newspaper
 Objectivity is coalescing with the language

Objectivity is anything throwing doubt on eternity

Jiri David

From *Reality as Fragmentary Objectivity*
 translated by Charlotta Kotik

Right, above:
Desert Stations 1988
 (detail from the installation)
 wood, masonite, oil and housepaint
 117 x 195 inches
 Photo: Tibor Zsitva



Right, below:
Selected Monuments 1984
 (detail from the series)
 ink, pencil, tempera, photographs
 24 x 31 inches
 Collection of Akos Vorosvary, Budapest



EL KAZOVSZKIJ

Born in Leningrad, U.S.S.R.
 Lives in Budapest, Hungary

One Person Exhibitions

1984 Szombathely Gallery,
 Szombathely
 Fényes Adolf Gallery, Budapest

1985 Arts Centre, Szolnok
 Third Eye Centre, Glasgow

1986 Arts Centre, Nyíregyháza
 Young Artists' Club, Budapest
 Liget Gallery, Budapest

1987 Neue Kierke, Amsterdam

1988 Kisceli Múzeum, Budapest
I parterv, Budapest

1989 Modern Museum, Szombathely

Selected Group Exhibitions

1984 Studio of Young Artists,
 Cuba and Poland
*Triennial of Scenery and
 Costumes*, Novi Sad, Yugoslavia
Határkövek (Landmarks),
 Austrian-Hungarian Exhibition,
 Eisenstadt,

1985 *Contemporary Visual Art in
 Hungary - 18 Artists*, Glasgow

New Sensibility III, Óbuda
 Basement Gallery, Budapest
 Studio of Young Artists,
 Prague, Brno, Czechoslovakia

1986 *Idézőjelben (In Quotation
 Marks)*, Csók István Gallery,
 Székesfehérvár
Triennial of Small Plastics,
 Fellbach, Germany
Hommage à Chirico, Fészek
 Gallery, Budapest
Eclectics 1985, National
 Gallery, Budapest
 Studio of Young Artists, Warsaw

1987 *Forty Years of Hungarian Fine
 Arts*, Art Gallery, Budapest
New Sensibility IV,
 Pécs Gallery, Pécs
Hungarian Fine Arts Today,
 Galerie de Künstler,
 Munich, Germany
*Mágikus művek, (Magic
 Creations)*, Lajos Street Gallery,
 Budapest
 Ernst Museum, Budapest
*Contemporary Hungarian Fine
 Arts*, Jerusalem, Tel-Aviv

1988 Studio of Young Artists, Warsaw
Aquarel Biennial, Eger
 Spring Exhibition, Art Gallery,
 Budapest

Opposite:
*Dsán-Panoptikum XXIX or
 Archesilaos' Dream IX* 1988
 (detail from the performance)
 performed at the Mücsarnok, Budapest
 Photo: Robert Szabo



**Dsan-Panoptikum XXIX or Archesi-
laos' Dream IX/ Pygmalion in the
Galatean Plantation**

1. We see a desert sandpit. This is where the desert ballet occurs. This is a mute art form, but now, in our time, it stiffens into the place of a long internal conversation. The discussion is about Pygmalion from Galatea. About the monument of Galatea. About the monument's monument. Or was it just about Coppelia? Then it is about Coppelia's monument. Or Eurdik? About Eurdik's monument? Let the desert Venus, itself, be the object of the internal discussion. Also desert animals gather around it. The many wandering animals. Then, this Venus is perhaps, itself, the good pastor? The good siren. A quite big siren in the desert.

2. Restrained/worked down/ monument damage beside conscious monument protection: if you cannot write on the monument, you cannot even scratch it and there isn't an appropriate bench or house wall in your close vicinity, then you can write on yourself, beneath the prescribed monument, rarely above it. In this mode the compulsive need of taking into possession and leaving marks is sublimated. Every pedestrian, while they are alive, is the compulsory art work and memory of their own life. A monument for itself, in front of itself. A monument of others as well. And before others! For whom does monument protection not refer to?

3. King Ludvig is madly in love with the young Helmut Berger and to reduce his sufferings, he begins madly constructing, and moreover, he discovers classical ballet, as an art form and as a morphine derivative.

El Kazovszkij

translated by Suzanne Mészöly

ŽELJKO KIPKE

Born in Čakovec, Yugoslavia, 1953
Lives in Zagreb

One Person Exhibitions

1984 *Underground Dogs*, Galerija proširenih medija, Zagreb

1985 *Transparent Spaces*, MM centar, Zagreb

1986 *Theatrum mundi*, Galerija suvremene umjetnosti, Zagreb

1987 *Cabinet of Praying Machines*, Salon Muzeja savremene umetnost, Belgrade
Petite histoire de la dualité, Galerija proširenih medija, Zagreb

1988 *Haddah*, Galerija JAT, Zagreb

Selected Group Exhibitions

1984 *From Monochrome to New Expressivity in Croatian Painting*, Galerija Karas, Zagreb; Galerija Matice Srpske, Novi Sad
3rd Biennale of Yugoslav Art, Yava Gallery, New York

1985 *Current Tendencies in Croatian Painting*, Muzej na svrmenata umetnost, Skopje

17e festival international de la peinture, Château-musée, Cagnes-sur-Mer, France

20 Internationale Malerwochen in der Steiermark, Neue Galerie, Graz, Austria

6 dubrovački salon, Umjetnička galerija, Dubrovnik

1986 *Towards the Museum of Contemporary Art*, Muzejski prostor, Zagreb

Art and Criticism in the mid-Eighties, Umjetnički paviljon, Collegium Artisticum, Sarajevo
Künstlerhaus, Graz
Hochschule für Angewandte Kunst, Vienna
Künstlerhaus, Klagenfurt, Austria

1987 *New Art from Yugoslavia*, Salzburger Kunstverein, Salzburg, Austria; Slovenská národná galeria, Bratislava; Výstavní síň U hybernu, Prague, Czechoslovakia; Umjetnička galérija, Dubrovnik; MSU, Belgrade; GSU, Zagreb; Moderna galerija, Ljubljana
Art in Change and Flux, Galerija Karas, Zagreb; Umjetnički paviljon "Cvijeta Zuzorić," Belgrade

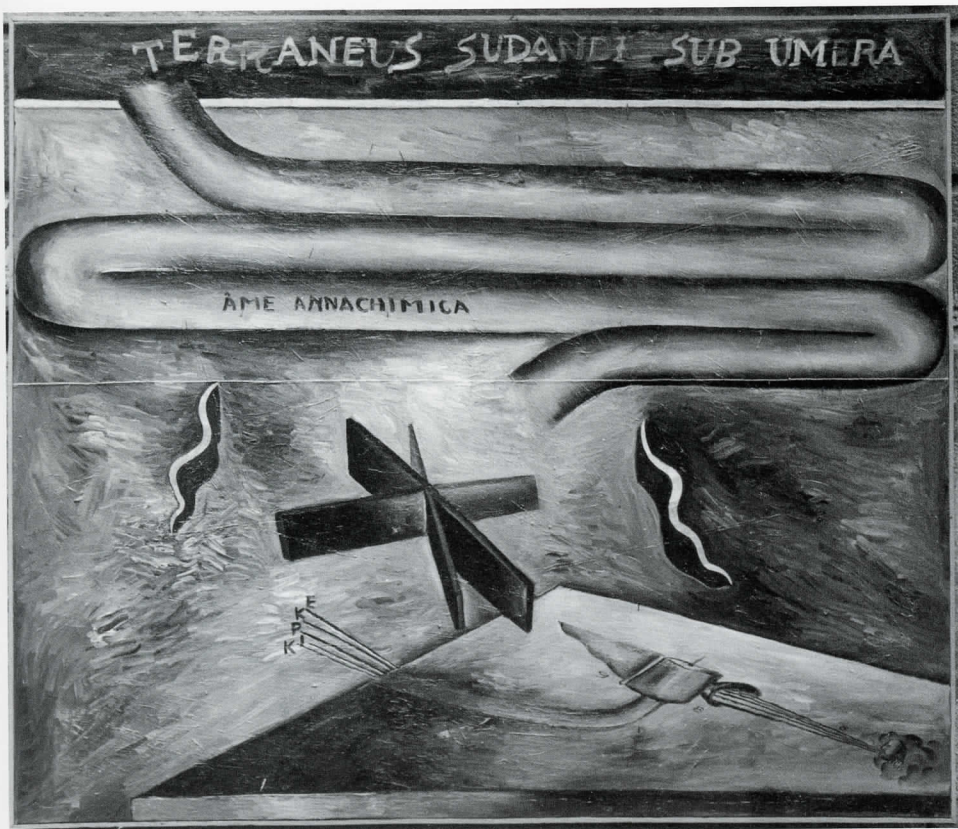
1988 *6th Triennale of Yugoslav Fine Art*, Beogradski sajam, Belgrade



Above:
Loge de aeqvilibrio 1987
wood, zinc and aluminum,
iron key, oil, on canvas
58 x 53 3/4 inches
Photo: Velizar Vesovic

Opposite, above:
Âme annachimica 1988
oil and aluminum sheets on canvas
67 x 78 3/4 inches
Photo: Velizar Vesović

Opposite, below:
In nomine machinae de Catalunya 1986
3 iron plates, aluminum plate,
synthetic paint and oil on canvas
64 1/2 x 79 inches
Photo: Velizar Vesović

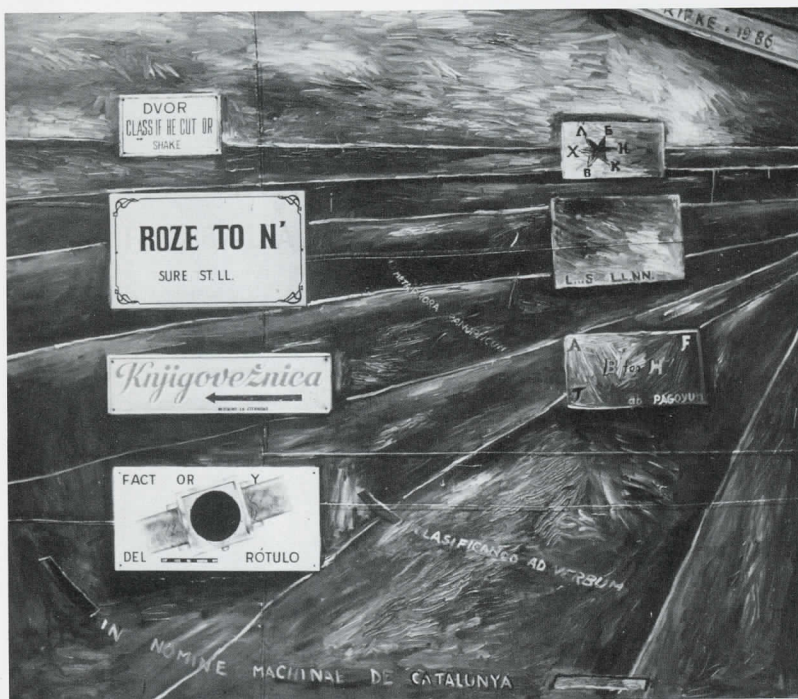


Mindus Subterraneus
(awaiting the Aeon of Entropy)

It was only some years ago that I knew the pain of initiation into alchemy. Cut by the blade of anamorphosis and inverted perspective, while enduring the wonder of transparent planes, I was restoring the ancient codex of integral painting. My eyes registered barely perceptible noises of Medieval frescoes and I listened to the frequency of yellow and black, painted surfaces. Without knowing it, I was mastering the technique of descent into the Underworld, where shadows conquer shadows, and an advertisement panel, wall-paper, or ornament on the stone floor activates the mechanism of prayer machines (Cabinet of Praying Machines).

The bizzare character of my paintings follows, more or less, in the footsteps of the European Mannerist tradition. Puzzling spaces on a two-dimensional plane reflect the treatises on unusual explorations into perspective. The models of oblique projections (anamorphosis) and Byzantine perspective are the driving force. The shadowy vocabulary looks into the blind spots of European avant-garde movements: there it meets the vast geography of *subterraneus*.

Željko Kipke
Zagreb, 1989
translated by Maja Šoljan



It occurred at dusk on a warm July day while I was returning from my day's wanderings. Content and slightly tired I decided to take a little rest. I put down my bag, took off my hat and sunk into the fragrant grass of a summer meadow.

Suddenly in the shadow of a large tree I saw a mighty rhinoceros. He was standing completely motionless, like a monument, looking toward the distant hills. Hidden in high grass, I prepared my camera. The rhinoceros did not notice me, being totally oblivious to his

environment - I decided to get closer. Only then did I see another rhinoceros, slightly smaller, but infinitely more beautiful. It was moving away...It was heading toward the hills beneath the setting sun. The first rhinoceros was watching intensely until the beautiful one disappeared behind the horizon. Only then did he move. He opened a little case, removed a palette and, with eyes full of tears, he began to paint.

Jirí Kovanda

Opposite:
Longing 1987
dispersion, tempera on canvas
47 x 47 inches

Below:
Fear of Future
dispersion, tempera on canvas
45 1/4 x 37 1/2 inches

JIRÍ KOVANDA

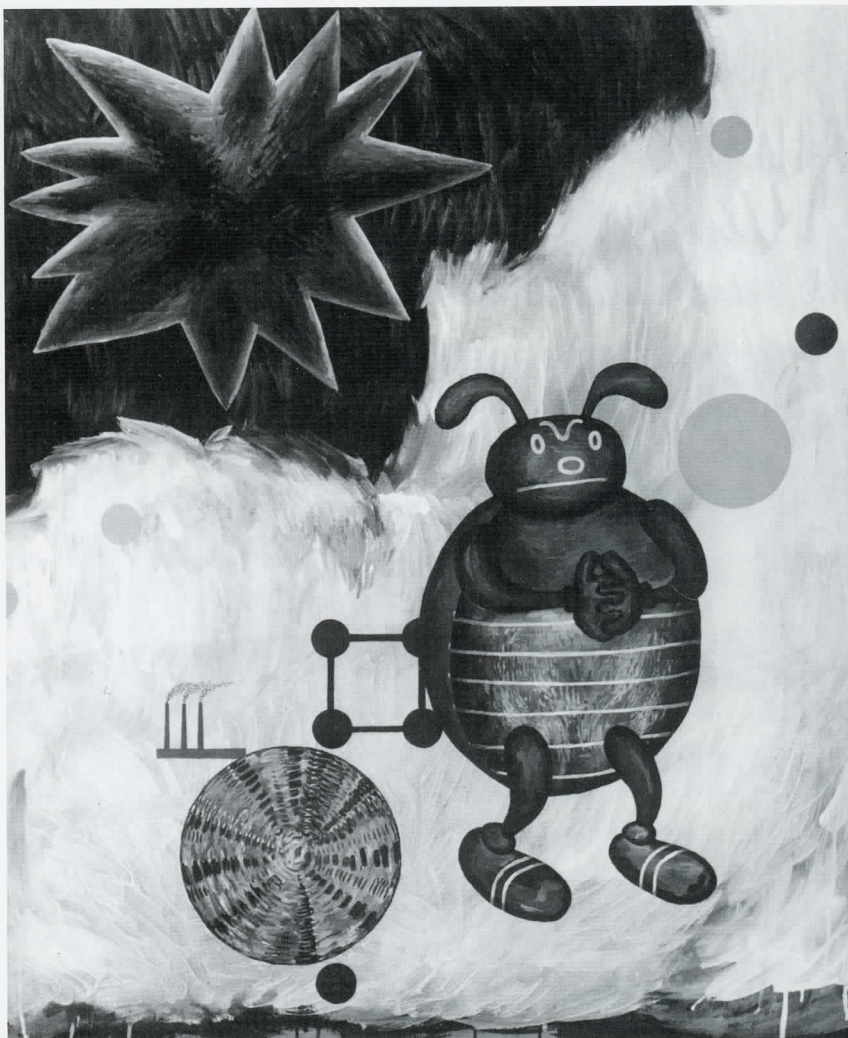
Born in Prague, Czechoslovakia, 1953
Lives in Prague

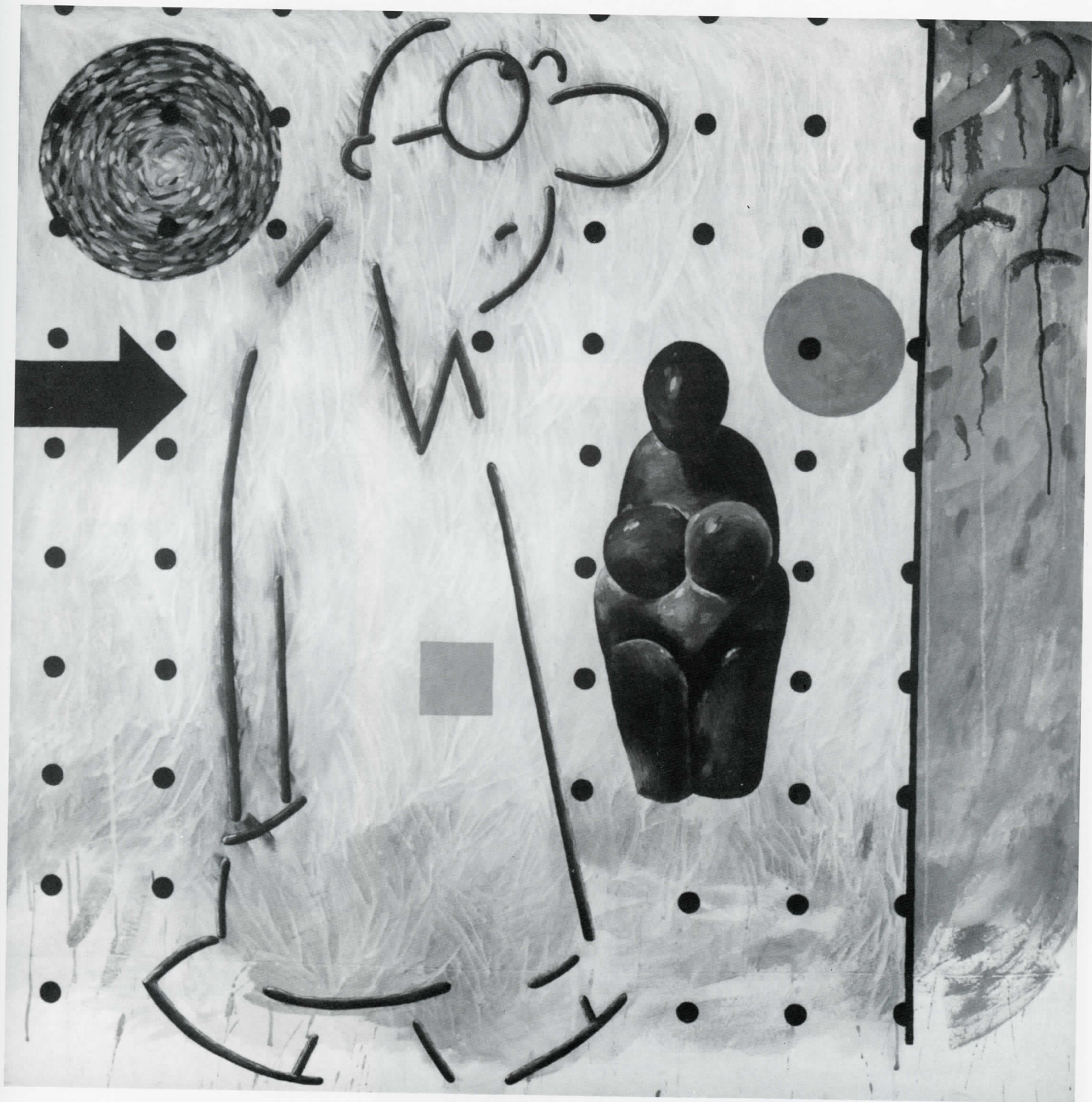
One Person Exhibitions

- 1984 Futurum, Prague
1987 KS Opatow, Prague
KS Blatiny, Prague
1988 Luna, Louny
MVS OKS, Liberec

Selected Group Exhibitions

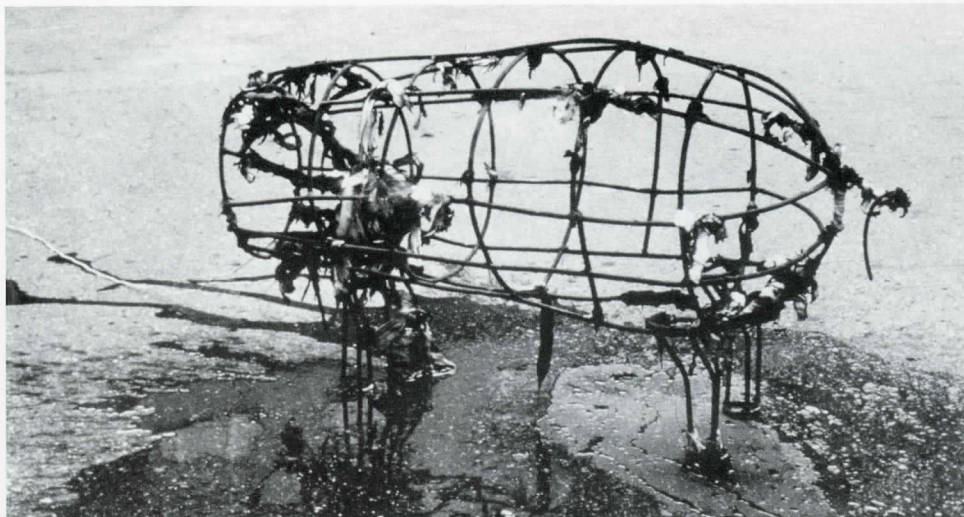
- 1986 *Confrontation IV*,
Praha-Smíchov
Confrontation V, Svárov
1987 *Confrontation VI*,
Praha-Vysočany
Exhibition 30, Lidový Dům,
Prague
Confrontation VII, Svárov
1988 *Humor 88*, County Gallery,
Hradec Králové
Humor 88, Gallery of Fine Arts,
Nové Město Moravě
Prague Days in Moscow,
Palace of Youth, Moscow





Right:
Metal Objects with Bulbs 1986
 wire structure with burned rags
 31 1/2 x 63 x 15 3/4 inches

Below:
Untitled 1988
 wood plywood, metal, twigs, pastel
 82 3/4 inches high
 Haag Centrum vor Aktuelle Kunst



MARIUSZ KRUK

Born in Poznań, Poland, 1952
 Lives in Poznań

Koło Klipsa Exhibitions

1984 Wielka 19 Gallery, Poznań

1985 Foksal Gallery, Warsaw
 Wielka 19 Gallery, Poznań
 BWA Gallery, Bydgoszcz
 Polish Theatre (painting shop),
 Poznań

1986 Wielka 19 Gallery, Poznań
 Krzysztofory Gallery, Cracow
Figures and Things, BWA
 Galleries, Puławy,
 Olsztyn and Szczecin
 Contemporary Theater, Wrocław

1987 BWA Gallery, Lublin
Biennale of New Art, Zielona Góra
Gruppenkunstwerke, Kassel

In 1987 Mariusz Kruk left the *Koło Klipsa* group.

One Person Exhibitions

1984 Krzysztofory Gallery, Cracow

1986 Pastels, Obraz Gallery, Poznań

1988 Desa Gallery, Poznań

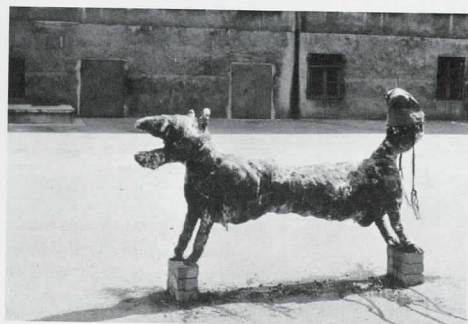
Selected Group Exhibitions

1986 *Polish Painting*,
 Richard Demarco Gallery,
 Arts Festival, Edinburgh

1987 *What's Going On*, Department
 of the Museum of Technology,
 former Norblin factory,
 Warsaw

1988 *Bruno Schulz*, SARP pavilion,
 Warsaw
And Now to Sculpture, SARP
 pavilion, Warsaw
Sculpture in the Garden, Sarp
 garden, Warsaw
 Haag Centrum vor Aktuelle
 Kunst, The Hague
Polish Realities,
 Third Eye Centre, Glasgow





Above:
Untitled 1988
 wood linen, jute, metal, stones,
 twigs, pastel, earth
 157 1/2 inches high
 Haag Centrum vor Aktuelle Kunst

Below:
Object on Bricks 1987
 wire structure with rags, plaster
 31 1/2 x 78 3/4 inches

I want pretty and ugly, clever and absurd
 to meet in my works.
 But what do pretty and absurd, wise and
 ugly mean?

Motto:
 Seen from the sky,
 Birds fly with their bellies
 upwards.

On the Woodcutter

The woodcutter had sat down
 in a forest clearing.
 He covered his eyes with his hands
 and said:
 "There would be no forest
 if it were not for me,
 there would be no forest
 if it were not for me."
 We, too, should close our eyes and repeat
 (without saying it):
 "There would be no forest were it not for
 the woodcutter,
 were it not for the woodcutter;
 there would be no forest were it not for
 the woodcutter,
 there Would Be no Forest were it not for
 the woodcutter."

On the Wolf

The wolf has a long fluffy tail,
 four paws and stripes.

The wolf has a long is,
 four stripes and a paw.

The wolf has a fluffy stripe, a paw.
 and four is.

There is no wolf.

On the Water

The water flows, the water freezes, the
 water evaporates, the water is green, the
 water is healthy, the water is pure...
 So what? What is water?

I have once been told that the earth is
 round. I haven't been told that it may
 also be triangular, square, and flat with a
 hole in the middle.

Damn earth! I have been taught that this
 table is round and that table is square. I
 haven't been taught that they only "say"
 that the earth is round and the table
 square. What do "is" and "isn't" mean?
 When am I to say that a table "is" or
 "isn't" if I say that a table "isn't" and it
 doesn't disappear; or I say that it "is"
 when it is rotten, has collapsed or
 changed into a bench?

Let us close our eyes and say:

"A circle is square,
 A square is round,
 A circle is square,
 A square is round,
 A circle is square,
 A square is round."

How beautiful a man in a hat looks!

How ridiculous a man in a hat looks!

Mariusz Kruk

An excerpt from *Fantastic Realism or on
 a Woodcutter, an Artist, and a Biologist*
 translated by Joanna Holzman

PIOTR KURKA

Born in Poznań, Poland, 1958

Lives in Poznań

One Person Shows

1985 *Flogiston*, Wielka 19 Gallery,
Poznań
Rain, Wielka 19 Gallery, Poznań

1986 *Sea*, installation, A.T. Gallery,
Poznań

1987 *From the Heart of Hearts*,
installation, Wielka 19 Gallery,
Poznań
Illustrations for Poems,
ON Gallery, Poznań

1988 *Got*, Desa Gallery, Poznań

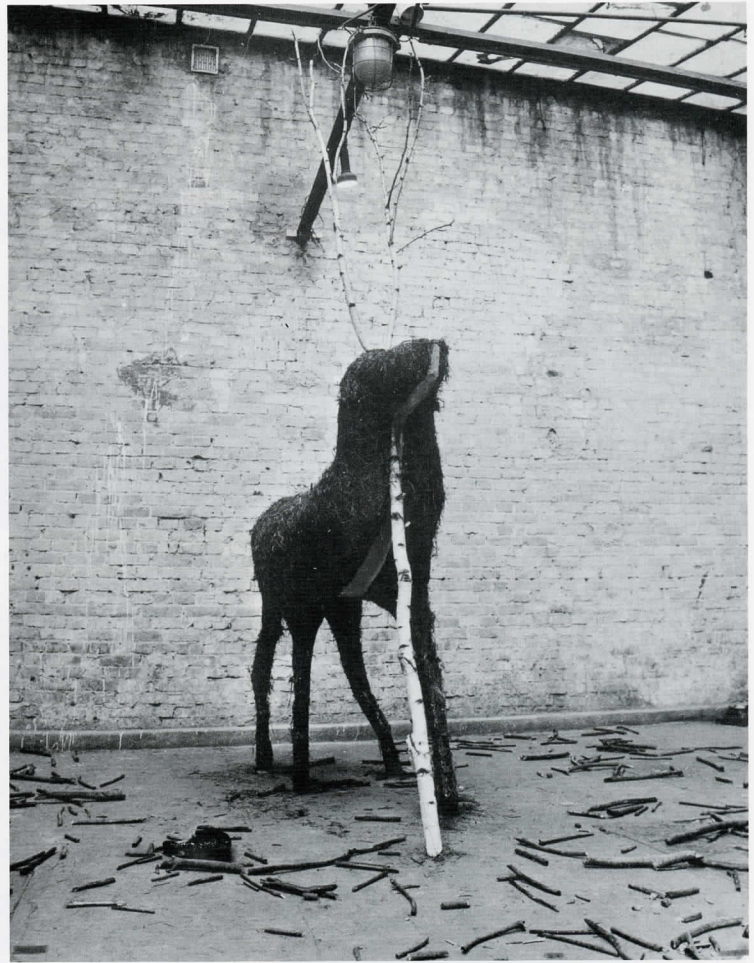
Selected Group Exhibitions

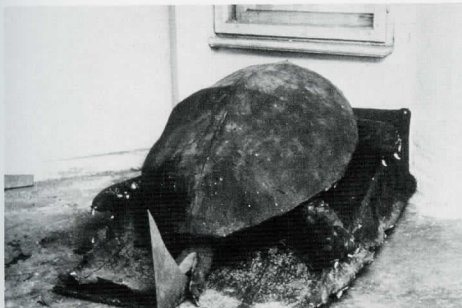
1985 National Museum, Poznań

1986 *Poznań's Young Art*,
BWA Gallery, Poznań
Junge Kunst aus Poznan,
Kubus Galerie, Hanover
Expression of the 1980s,
BWA Gallery, Sopot

1987 *2nd Biennale of New Art*,
Zielona Góra
What's Going On, Department
of the Museum of Technology,
former Norblin Factory,
Warsaw

1988 *Bruno Schulz*, SARP pavilion,
Warsaw
And Now to Sculpture, SARP
pavilion, Warsaw
Sculpture in the Garden, SARP
Garden, Warsaw
*Haag Centrum vor Aktuelle
Kunst*, The Hague
Polish Realities, DOM, Glasgow
Art Gallery and Museum
Kelvingrove





Opposite , above:
From the Heart of Hearts 1987
 (detail from installation)
 Wielka 19 Gallery, Poznań
 metal mesh, paper maché, pine needles, birch
 branch
 157 1/2 x 82 3/4 x 35 1/2 inches
 Photo: Włodzimierz Kowalinski

Opposite, below:
Caretaker 1987
 Mixed media
 78 x 30 x 12 in.

This page, above:
Turtle 1987
 Mixed media
 46 3/4 x 58 1/2 x 31 1/4 inches

Below:
 Untitled 1988
 Mixed media

WE ARE (1) always the same in our desire to define things. Proud and hence confident of your power over, and knowledge of (matter), you cross your legs and breath out the smoke. You are not aware (even though you may see the shadow) that the chair behind you has crossed its legs and is greedily breathing in the slowly scattering cloud.

What a lovely poplar in the windless weather. The silvery-green leaves vibrate, their movements seem HUMBLE (2), and each is inclined at a different angle. I and my Dearest One are sitting on the opposite ends of a stump. There is no sign to prompt a vague feeling in me, and the feeling is too vague to make me lift my eyelids; I hear her say something about the green conical canopy above us. We may rub it away into pulp piece by piece (*how impermanent it is*). I bend my head back even more, and then it is too late.

In my home, chairs always ATTENDED (3) on tables. Yet some chairs rebelled, ran away and, swollen with conceit, hid in the corners. Now they want to be in the limelight and attended to. The dogs are not allowed to jump upon them. Vodka has recently been sprinkled over one of those bandits - it has stretched and we are now allowed to sleep on it.

'Naively' to rely on things for knowledge that is given to us (Heidegger). It might

have also been he who told us about the Holzwege, the forest paths lying DORMANT (4) within, (or perhaps without), ourselves. They are travelled by human freedom which gives rise to Existence. To be frank, I have made it all up, but memory may also transform the truth. The above is a lie.

It is not true that a ban on incest lies at the basis of culture. What lies at the basis of culture is fear. A succession of contradictory conventions gives an elusive beginning to a sequence of transparent avant-gardes. Fear is the true beginning of every avant-garde; it is perhaps even more dismal than the original fear. When will erudition become a relic, and eloquence unfashionable? What is WITHIN US (5) is really there...and the man from Mexico is truly eloquent and erudite.

Because we have an urge to penetrate unrealized structures beyond the stream of actual behavior, we are becoming aware of how POWERLESS (6) we are.

Jean Cocteau: "We are humble servants of powers lying dormant within ourselves."

Piotr Kurka

From *We are humble servants*
 translated by Joanna Holzman

Deconstruction, Quotation & Subversion
VIDEO FROM YUGOSLAVIA

DECONSTRUCTION OF SYMBOLS AND MYTH

Mladen Materić, *Dance of the 80's (Ples osamdesetih)*, 9 minutes, 1984. Produced in association with TV Sarajevo by Open Stage Obala.

Goran Gajić and Zoran Pezo, *Merry Television: Mirko and Slavko (Vesela Televizija: Mirko i Slavko)*, 10 minutes, 1985.

Mare Kovačić, *The American Dream*, 6 minutes, 1986. Produced by Max-Brut, Ljubljana.

Miha Vipotnik, *Baptized Under Mt. Triglav (Krst pod Triglavom)*, 21 minutes, 1987. With The Sisters of Scipion Nasice, Neue Slowenische Kunst. Produced by Magenta, Cankarjev dom and TV Ljubljana.

Milan Peca Nikolić, *Images of Kosovo*, 11 minutes, 40 seconds, 1989. Produced by TV Belgrade.

QUOTATION AND REFERENCE

Breda Beban and Hrvoje Horvatić, *For You in Me and Me in Them to be One, (Ja u njima u meni da budu sasvim jedno)*, 29 minutes, 1989. Produced by Beban/Horvatić and Kresimir Huzjan in association with TV Belgrade.

Aleksandar Stankovski, Hristo Pop Dučev, and Zlatko Trajkovski, *Closeness*, 6 minutes, 1987. Produced by TV Skopje.

Marina Gržinić and Aina Šmid, *The Girl With an Orange (Deklica z Oranzo)*, 9 minutes, 35 seconds, 1987. Produced by RTV, Ljubljana.

Dalibor Martinis, *Liquid Ice (Tekući led)*, 12 minutes, 1988. Produced by TV Belgrade.

SUBVERTING ART AND THE MEDIA

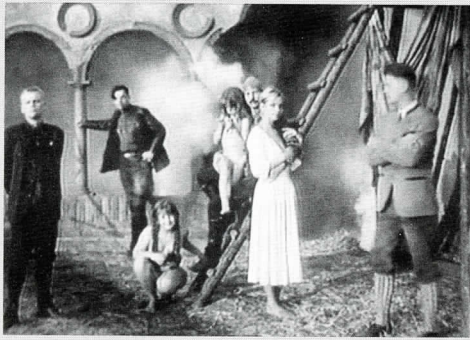
Igor Riđanović, *TV Test*, 7 minutes, 1988.

TV Gallery: Milan Peca Nikolić and Dragica Vukovic, *Essays on Modern Art (Ogledi iz moderne umetnosti)*, 36 minutes, 1987. Produced by TV Belgrade.

Marina Gržinić and Aina Šmid, *Axis of Life (Os življenja)*, 6 minutes, 1987. Produced by SKUC Forum and Max-Brut, Ljubljana.

Jurij Korenc, *Radio Student: 20 Years of Media Fights, (RadioŠtudent: 20 let medijskih bojev)*, 4 minutes, 1989. Produced by Studio 37, Ljubljana.

Retrovizija: Peter Vezjak, *Laibach: Sympathy for the Devil*, 5 minutes, 40 seconds, 1988. Produced by Retrovizija, Neue Slowenische Kunst.



The video works in this exhibition present authors (artists and directors) who live and work in the capital cities of the five republics of Yugoslavia: Ljubljana, in the northern republic of Slovenia; the republic of Croatia's sophisticated city of Zagreb; the mountain city of Sarajevo in the republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina with its prominent Turkish influence; Skopje, in the southern republic of Macedonia which borders the Balkan peninsula; and the capital of Yugoslavia (and the republic of Serbia), Belgrade. In terms of physical geography or culture, Yugoslavia is far from homogeneous. It is a multi-national state with a socialist social structure, made up of six republics.* On the southern edge of Europe, Yugoslavia shares common history with Central as well as Southern and Eastern Europe. Centuries old religious and political turmoil, territorial conflict and occupation by warrior dynasties have left a legacy which locates Yugoslav aesthetics in a particularly complex setting of past and present. This has provided artists with a dense and mysterious mythology.

Subversion, Quotation, and Deconstruction: Video from Yugoslavia presents works that include the use of sophisticated television technology as well as simple and straightforward VHS recording. And, although a rich variety of topics and issues are explored, an underlying concern for post-war history—as well as present day political and economic crisis in Yugoslavia—is a prominent current throughout the three thematic programs. Yugoslav film, design and literature have provided the main sources of art references for American audiences, yet, in the 60s and 70s Yugoslav participation in the conceptual art movement was particularly strong, and positioned artists in the country at the crossroads of contemporary art theory during that tumultuous, influential era. Works by these avant-garde artists are well known in Yugoslavia as alternative information which has informed the current generation of video artists with a rigorous conceptual tradition.

Each of the three thematic programs include artists who have found a variety of ways and methods of working. *Subverting Art and the Media* includes work which concentrates on themes of power in the art world and the media. It includes work that invents new documen-

tary and narrative approaches, as well as computer images in the conceptual tradition.

This program expresses a picture of how artists contribute to the continuing dialogue on cultural power. It reveals a relationship of the individual to the system, as a powerful participant. *Quotation and Reference* presents video with texts, film and print references which often subvert romantic images via a powerful juxtaposition of specific quotations—both historic and contemporary.

Deconstruction of Symbols and Myth points to the prejudices which artists must confront when representing socialist ideology. The deconstruction of myth and symbol is evident when the portrayal of powerful political signs and symbols are used theatrically, and in narrative video. Often more ambivalent types of deconstruction occur in artists' treatment of such things as partisans, the American fantasy, and the Soviet culture.

These Yugoslav authors have often been commissioned by the cultural programs of their regional or national television. They also collaborate with private video companies, with cultural institutions, or work independently with VHS equipment. Their spirit to create works that unveil their own history is unique and important. The Yugoslav video author creates work outside of a system, finding little financial support in the already economically starved art system, and unlike film, there is no government sponsored international distribution network. Perhaps the strategies necessary to create work have influenced Yugoslav video, which today—like the culture—is completely on a level of serious political discourse. Art is tolerated as a function of cultural reality. This selection presents that work—video—which is positioned at the edge of ethical, social, and cultural reality.

Fortunately, artists throughout Yugoslavia have begun to understand that a spurious form can subvert the ideology of an imposed cultural framework. Their intervention and discourse in video hints of the future.

Kathy Rae Huffman

* Until recently, the largely Albanian territory of Kosovo was an autonomous province—but when legislated into Serbia in 1989 (along with the autonomous province of Vojvodina), it caused a public outcry, which resulted in military conflict and a state-of-emergency in that region. This escalating conflict has fueled longstanding tensions between the four major nationalities throughout the country.

Above, left: still from *Laibach: Sympathy for the Devil*,
by Retrovizija: Peter Vezjak

Partial Moments: The History of Video In Yugoslavia

Yugoslavia is presently undergoing a nationwide transformation of its ideas about progress, toward a more qualitative and humane vision of the future, with an awakening of a renewed spirit of internationalism. Cultural and artistic movements are also going through serious processes of critical systematization and evaluation of the results achieved in previous decades. This cathartic process is being undertaken to reaffirm all of those qualitative realizations that have clearly expressed artistic identity, and not only from a Yugoslav perspective. One can even say that this wave of artistic transformation has radically and concretely affected all environments at some level. Therefore, as Yugoslavia finds itself at an important crossroads at the end of the eighties—and renews social, political and economic relations—the country also faces efforts to overcome its own crisis by opening up more thoroughly, both internally and externally, its system of functioning.

Each region in Yugoslavia has a different cultural center, background and approach to art. And although various separate linguistic and conceptual orientations can be identified, the parts create a picture of multiform and complex artistic events. Among the artists themselves, a certain generational hierarchy has been established which can allow a critical consciousness to form. Three generations of contemporary artists can be identified which have established dialogues, and emphasized their own creative individualism. Group work is less present now, as opposed to the early seventies or early eighties.

The Yugoslav video scene exists within a multinational cultural climate. Without delineating that context further it can be said that, although there are many similarities within the dominant artistic tendencies, differences can be established with specific categorizations. Video is, after all, a much tighter field, with fewer makers. Yugoslav video, in its early years, shares a pioneering role in the formation of an international video culture. This history begins at about the same time as the new art movement in the late sixties and early seventies. The appearance of new artistic research in Ljubljana, Zagreb and Belgrade came about at the same time as conceptual art, land art and *arte povera*. For the younger group of Yugoslav artists then, it was an important moment which opened broader communication with, and the inclusion of Yugoslavia into, world art movements. Above all, it was the moment for new articulation in both art and art criticism. Yugoslav artists began to express new views about their consciousness, ideas that concerned the functioning, meaning, place and role of art in contemporary society.

The Yugoslav policy of opening up — even at the level of cultural events — was first realized in the sixties, and was accompanied by numerous important international festivals and gatherings such as the *New Tendencies* exhibition, the *Music Biennial* in Zagreb and the *Graphics Biennial* in Ljubljana. BITEF (Belgrade International Theater Festival), which began in 1967, was responsible for introducing many international performers to Yugoslavia, including productions by The Living Theater, Grotowski, Bread and Puppet Theater, Ronconi, and La Mama. From 1968 until 1983 there was an *Art BITEF* that began a multimedia program which included the most contemporary artistic works from Yugoslavia and throughout the world. Leading art critics took part in these manifestations, and Germano Celant, Catherine Millet, and Achille Bonito Oliva, were among the many participants. Invited artists included Joseph Beuys, Kounellis, Daniel Buren, Pistoletto, Paolini, and Chiari. Festivals have continued to play a significant role for Yugoslav artists from all disciplines, including video, to this day.

The Student Cultural Center in Belgrade opened in 1971, and became a center of new culture. It remains so today, with its national and international multimedia programs. *The Festival of Expanded Media* (1972-1976), which formed the identity of this young institution, brought together artists representative of a variety of forms of contemporary expression: performance, music, theater, dance, video, film and photography. In 1972, at the first *Festival of Expanded Media*, Luciano Giaccari of Varese, presented the first video exhibition in Yugoslavia, a program from the Italian *Studio 1970*. In following years, many international video guests participated in these unique festivals, which later evolved into the April Video Meetings. By bringing portable video equipment into Yugoslavia, visiting artists were able to produce, and present, single channel video works and installations. Artists such as Jack Moor, Ulrike Rosenbach, Willoughby Sharp and Ursula Krinzinger presented work at the Student Cultural Center and introduced video concepts to Yugoslav artists throughout the seventies.

The first videotape by a Yugoslav was done in 1968 by Nuša and Srečo Dragan, two Slovenian artists from Ljubljana. Also, several minimal video art works were made by Ilija Soškić in the early seventies. In 1973, for *Audiovisuelle Botschaften* at Trigon 73, a festival in Graz, Austria, several Yugoslav artists, including Sanja Iveković, Dalibor Martinis, Boris Bučan and Goran Trbuljak, realized their first video works. This initial period of activity was intense, creatively fruitful, and in many ways characterized the establishment of a direct, personal relationship between the artist and the medium. The camera, in this early work, was seen as a prolongation of the hand or eye. The early experiences from this “warm period” of video were closely linked to the direct relationship between artist and camera. The idea of the work was a kind of research into the realm of the

medium, in the spirit of early technology: a static camera, one shot, real time, minimal events and most often the artist was the object of the work. Throughout Yugoslavia, video developed in a situation of intensive production by using equipment brought by visiting artists. Production of video work in Yugoslavia also began with the cooperation that came from Galerie Ursula Krinzinger (Innsbruck, Austria), the Gallery del Cavalino (Venice, Italy), as well as from Ingrid and Žika Dacić of Tübingen. Another important influence was the program Europe-America produced by the Art/Tape 22 studio in Florence.

An important video performance in Belgrade from those early years was *Liberation of the Voice*, by Marina Abramović, realized by Jack Moor. Marina, the performer, was in one space, while the public was in another, viewing the event on a big screen which portrayed only the open mouth of the performer, out of which came the amplified sound of a bellowing "a." The simultaneity, only possible with live video, and the heightened atmosphere of the scream, had a highly mediated character. While the public watched the scene, the stifled expression of the face became a real drama of "liberation" as the performer gradually lost control and fainted. An important body of video works was made by a group of artists from Belgrade who were involved in performance, photography, film and minimalist music during the mid-seventies. This group included Radomir Damnjan, Raša Todosijević, Neša Paripović, and Miša Savić. Unfortunately, because of poor technical conditions, they stopped working with video. A lack of equipment continues in Belgrade, and even during the eighties, as young videomakers became interested in the medium, the irregularity of production possibilities provoked a serious scarcity in new video production and presentation. The fact that the early artists using video in Belgrade stopped working in the medium widened the gap between the early, reductivist video work and the new, complex technological productions. Further, it has provoked a retreat from the medium by visual artists in Belgrade.

In the second half of the seventies, and to some extent into the early eighties, multidisciplinary work was gradually abandoned and a renewal of separatism began to dominate the various fields of art. Video acquired a greater autonomy. Even so, Belgrade artists such as Paripović, Todosijević, Damnjan, Savić, and others, demonstrated a very high level of technical and artistic quality through classical expression. These works were recognized at international festivals, and received a prize from the video section of the Locarno Film Festival.

In Zagreb, Goran Trbuljak, Mladen Stilinović, and Boris Demur were engaged in conceptual/linguistic interventions and critical imitations of media clichés. Ladislav Galeta, even though most of his work was in experimental film, presented some interesting minimal works in



Top: still from *Laibach: Sympathy for the Devil*, by Retrovizija: Peter Vezjak

Center: still from *Liquid Ice (Tekući led)*, by Dalibor Martinis

Bottom: still from *The American Dream*, by Mare Kovačić.

video. Sanja Iveković and Dalibor Martinis worked on individual portraits in which Sanja problematized the media image of woman, and Dalibor the image of man, through an optical analysis of segments of the body.

The first instance of artists' work on broadcast television was initiated by Miha Vipotnik, and began in Ljubljana in 1979. This videomaker also introduced into Yugoslav video parameters a new, highly technical specific video language. For the first time jump cuts, editing, and superimpositions became significant elements in video post-production. With new technical possibilities during the early eighties, the field of video was repopulated with authors from a wide range of interests. Generally speaking, video embarked on a period of "independent video production."

The Yugoslav video scene took a significant step forward in 1983. In Ljubljana, during autumn, the first international video festival—*CD 83*—was held, co-directed by Miha Vipotnik and Marie-Claude Vogric. Europe at that time was a true explosion of video festivals, and the Ljubljana manifestation fit into the general interest and affirmation of video as an important discipline of creative media expression. This festival, however, had a much deeper and more important influence in Yugoslavia than other festivals abroad. There was an organizational novelty in the whole program. Beside the projection of tapes, discussions and video installations, it was possible to produce videotapes using high standard television equipment during the festival itself.

While in other countries throughout Europe the combination of broadcast television with independent production was unheard of, *CD 83* was produced and co-organized by broadcast television. Also in 1983, the April Video Meeting in Belgrade was instituted at The Student Cultural Center, which began a regular annual meeting of artists and critics. Likewise, festivals and video meetings have been held in Sarajevo and Skopje.

There are many reasons why the first video festival was held in Ljubljana. Above all, this was the place where the International Graphics Biennale is traditionally held, as well as the International Design Show, which means that reproductive media are well respected by both the public and cultural institutions. The second more fundamental reason is the existence of video groups gathered around the SKUC (Student Cultural Center in Ljubljana), which, by its alternative stance and numerous media activities, provided support for a completely new kind of video production. In Ljubljana, independent video studios were opened. Unlike artists, independent producers also worked freelance, from time to time, for TV Ljubljana. Altogether, this climate of diverse possibilities for video production,

as well as Ljubljana's history as a center for design and graphics, created an atmosphere for an important international video gathering.

In various countries in Europe, depending on the cultural support and artistic ambition that brought some to the forefront of the scene, there was a polarization in video production. Already in the mid-eighties, strong national tendencies could be observed: of video theater in Italy, or in France of a video ballet, as well as of the specificities of English video, or of the identifiable artistic orientation of the German authors. In a linguistic sense, video works were defined by genres, elaborating different themes and relationships with neighboring disciplines such as television, film, photography, or experiences from the field of fine arts. What is important to stress is that within this wide production, a clear video language sought itself out and formulated itself as an autonomous, independent category within the general expansion of video as a medium in the domain of music and publicity clips, or of documentary or dramatic usage.

Yugoslav videomakers actively took part in the international scene through art shows and video festivals. Because of the nature of the medium, and artists' participation in the organization of the international video community, Yugoslav artists have participated in many of the major exhibitions this decade. Dalibor Martinis and Sanja Iveković, artists originally coming from the field of conceptual art, managed to harmonize, in an exceptional manner, the media structure of speech with very precise ideas and contents. A specific media sensibility characterizes their work. In their very developed visual culture, their work represents a completed whole. Their repertoire of technical means is reduced to its most essential and elementary measure. It is important also to underline the signified side of their work, which expresses, in each case, one of the essential themes pertaining to the position of man and society in contemporary life.

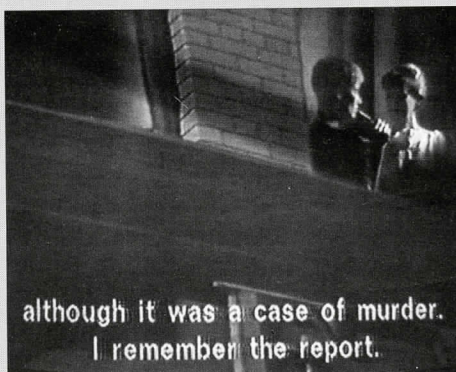
Many other young, yet notable video artists work in video in Yugoslavia today (young in age or in time spent working in the medium). Two very remarkable women, Marina Gržinić and Aina Šmid who, after an experimental phase of alternative video, produced several tapes based on cinematic clichés and expressive content where past met present, have created a specific video form. Originating from the SKUC production group, the work of these authors offers us a view of the cultural and social context in which they act. There are various other new alternative video producers in Ljubljana who lean on an experience of performance, film, photography, and above all, rock music, all with provocative and engaged content. These new authors include Marjan Osole MAX, Mare Kovačić, and others who use video for documentation purposes. The SKUC provides many circumstances for all fields of artistic, theatrical and musical events, and these events, in turn, have provided a kind of motto, or style for artists. The alternative Ljubljana scene is an interesting phenomenon

because of its radical position vis-a-vis current Yugoslav political events. Slovenian video authors, since they support certain ideological clichés as models of expression, risk acquiring a negative meaning, retroactively. The form of a political attraction and provocation in their works is interesting and intriguing, especially in the West, so, thereby, the concept of function and sense of alternative strategies takes on new, radically different meanings.

In the early eighties, the years of surging forward, theoretical conflicts over the function and domain of video as an expressive art form were common. Video, and its place between the often opposing poles made up of gallery and museum institutions, new festival institutions, and television as a technological base, challenged cultural institutions. These conflicts inspired many new happenings. On the one hand we witness the appearance of new spatial solutions for video installations, and on the other hand, we see the active participation of television in search of its own language and creative identity. In any case, the eighties have been stimulating for the work of videomakers. The role of Yugoslav broadcast television in the eighties and its openness toward the production of video art has been significant. Although Ljubljana Television made the first initial steps, other centers have taken over and now play a leading role in the support of video production. The interest of broadcast television is more than valuable considering the difficulties and expenses involved for artists in the realization of a video project, especially in the present economic situation in Yugoslavia.

Belgrade Television's editor of *TV Gallery*, Dunja Blažević, certainly deserves commendation for her personal involvement to change old forms of comprehension about television, and to introduce new models of cooperation. Since 1982, *TV Gallery* has offered numerous possibilities for the production and broadcast of creative work in certain segments of Yugoslav national televisions' culture program. These efforts to establish a higher level of production for videomakers are directed toward a better understanding of the role of television as the most direct and important communication medium today.

In addition to Belgrade TV, the serious contribution of Skopje TV, as well as Sarajevo Television, provide many opportunities for artists. Two particular videomakers have utilized television to create a unique body of work. Breda Beban and Hrvoje Horvatić, from Zagreb, have formulated mythical scenes about the middle ages and monastery monuments. On the other hand, working independent of television standards and concepts in their club in Zagreb, two young people, Zoran Pezo and Goran Gajić, started a program called *Vesela Televizija (Merry Television)* with very modest VHS equipment. This "merry" program has a provocative and alternative function in relation to formalized, static television programs.



Top: still from *Axis of Life (Os življenja)*, by Marina Gržinić and Aina Šmid

Center: still from *For You in Me and Me in Them to be One (Ja u njima u meni da budu sasvim jedno)*, by Breda Beban and Hrvoje Horvatic

Bottom: still from *Merry Television: Mirko and Slavko (Vesela Televizija: Mirko i Slavko)*, by Goran Gajić and Zoran Pezo

Today, video presentation finds itself in a totally new position. Video is experiencing new production, presentation and distribution strategies, so that one can practically speak of a new beginning. Belgrade television, as the strongest production center for video, has become a model for Yugoslav television strategy, and defines a high level of quality. But throughout Yugoslavia, the fundamental question of equipment availability has more or less restricted videomakers' interest. Whenever equipment was made available, work was initiated, either by individual makers or groups with professional or amateur equipment. In the last couple of years for example, Belgrade's Academic Film Center at Culture Hall, Studenski Grad, came up with a group of young artists who made their first video. Elements of punk rock, an attitude of alienated urban life and social isolation can be recognized in their work, which is often unedited, real time documentation with VHS equipment.

Although this review presents only partial moments in the history of video production in Yugoslavia, one can begin to understand some essential questions concerning the function, meaning, place and role of video in the Yugoslav cultural scene. Awards that individual authors have received can be taken as arguments in support of a notable presence on the international scene. Television is very important to deepen and further research, and, what is more, to open a broader and more complex international cooperation in the spirit of the opening to the world that the last half of the eighties has offered us.

Biljana Tomić

translated by Ivan Vejvoda and Jelena Mesić



Top: still from *Dance of the 80's*
(Ples osamdesetih), by Mladen Materic

Center: still from *Baptized Under Mt. Triglav*
(Krst pod Triglavom), by Miha Vipotnik

Bottom: still from *Images of Kosovo*,
by Milan Peca Nikolic

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