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Six Macedonian Artists

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This text was archived at the Institute for Contemporary Art in Zagreb collection, as part of the **Research project** conceived in 1997 by a SCCAN – Soros Centers for Contemporary Art Network, funded by the Open Society Foundation, New York.

The purpose of the project was to select, collect and disseminate texts on contemporary art practices in the Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia, around Soros Centers for Contemporary Art, written in and about art of the 1990s. The coordination of the project was carried out by Janka Vukmir, SCCA – Zagreb, today the Institute for Contemporary Art, Zagreb.

We did not intervene in any of texts more than just correcting obvious typos and spelling. On the occasion of collecting texts, we were given permission from all authors, to rightfully use them. If anyone now has different instructions, please, contact us at the info@institute.hr.

All of the texts we have collected at the time have been later published on the website of the I_CAN, International Contemporary Art Network, the short-lived successor of the SCCAN.

On the occasion of the exhibition **90s: Scars**, revisiting the art practices and social and political context of the 1990s in the postcommunist countries, the Institute for Contemporary Art is now reoffering a collection of **89 texts and a comprehensive list of then proposed further readings**, on the website of the Institute for Contemporary Art, www.institute.hr.

The exhibition 90s: Scars is curated by Janka Vukmir and organized by the Institute for Contemporary Art and the MMSU – Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Rijeka, on the occasion of the **European Cultural Capital Rijeka 2020**. Originally planned to open May 14, 2020, at the MMSU in Rijeka, due to COVID-19 crisis, is postponed until further notice.

Sonja Abadziewa

Six Macedonian Artists

"From the Miraculousness of the Meadow to the Joy of Living"

The determination to exhibit the works of art from six Macedonian authors was not motivated by their sharing a particular fine artistic direction. Their work is mirroring a specific part of the contemporary moment of the Macedonian art, which anticipates different creative reacting. Despite their being descended from the art academies in various Yugoslav capitals, and despite their age spanning of nearly twenty years (1941-1959), these artists are of interest to us because of their creative rhetoric in defending the dignity of the fine art entity.

The joint presenting of the painters Simon Šemov, Dimitar Manev, and Dragan Petković, as well as sculptors Aneta Svetieva, Gligor Stefanov and Petre Nikoloski, was induced by their relatively balanced intellectual and creative potentials, by the correspondence of their thinking, by their pursuing individual poetics, that is to say, by the very coincidence of their attitudes towards life and art.

At first sight it might seem confusing to couple the colouristic Neo-Cubism of D. Manev and the contemplative plastic of A. Svetieva, or the swaying gesture of G. Stefanov and the lyrical nostalgia of P. Nikoloski, or the pastoral expression of S. Šemov and the urban resounding gesture of D. Petković. However, a deeper penetration into the ontological layers of their works, gradually reveals the fundamentals of the unique rhythm in their creative pulsation. That closeness, or even the identity of their attitudes and perceptions, in terms of the "correspondances" of Baudelaire, are manifested on several levels:

- The six authors are exceeding the context of the established artistic movements, stepping out of the formalist pictorial framework. Their creative challenge is being accomplished through critical denial of the conventions, of the established taste, of the conformed. The artists are in permanent move: in order to build the new through demolishing, and to destroy the dogma through projecting. This ANTI-CONFORMIST behaviour presupposes heretic abandoning of what has been commonly accepted, as an alternative to the established methodology, that is, as an "aesthetic consciousness rebelling against the transformation of tradition into a norm" (Filiberto Menna). And, since the progress of their explorative and inquisitive spirit is not harmonised to the compromises of "swimming downstream", austere disciplinary and stylistic differentiation and definition becomes futile. Stefanov, for example, is constructing a pictorial amalgam, which comprises concurrently connotations of a sculpture, an object, an ambience, an installation, environmental rearrangement ...; with Petković the classic painting is, actually, being physically disintegrated - shredded into several autonomous fragments; Svetieva is depriving the sculpture-on-the-postament from its aura by shoving it into the soil; Nikoloski literally lends his "cage-sculptures"; Šemov is constructing a specific architectonics of time-space recollections ...

- The artistic passion, the enthusiasm of creating and promoting fine artistic authenticity in their works is correlated with an AESTHETIC EUDEMONISM, with extensive aestheticality which is "ready to revert the biologic origin and historic unity of man and nature ... to pull the society from the condition of discord and incongruity" (F. Menna). Interested in utter harmonisation among the individual and the ambience of its accomplishment, these authors are striving for a renewal of the primary meaning of aesthetics (*aisthesis* as "a sensitivity or the first level of cognition). Wearied by the obstructed functioning and correspondence between the systems (economy, politics, culture, arts ...), on the one hand, and by the threat of mechanisation (rationalisation of human activities) on the other, they opt for Orpheus as a champion of introducing "a higher order in the universe, as a poet of deliverance, deity which brings peace and salvation, bringing together the human and the nature, not by force but with lyrics" (Herbert Marcuse). The very support for these standpoints speaks of an extended interpretation of creativity, not only as "art of the artists", but as a possibility of the individual for aesthetic expression. Recovering of the dignity of archetypal images of the aesthetic is conveyed in terms of salvation from the possible death of art, pacing in direction of reinstated liberation.

- "Acting over the fundamental impulse - that is to say, the urge for play - the aesthetic function would abolish the constraint and it would bring the man to the freedom, morally and physically" (H. Marcuse). The above mentioned PLAY represents one of the key specifics in the work of these artists, conceived in its flexible meaning. In this case it is of interest to them as a way of voluntarily release of creative energy, as a ritual, a way of contest and struggle (agon) - arouser of artist's fantasy and invention. Identifying the play with the creative stimulus is particularly immanent to the fine-artistic evolution of Šemov - an artist enthralled for many years by the charms of children games and their ancient as much as ever actual features. Svetieva is interested in the archaic, cult meaning of the dolls, while Nikoloski treasures the children's hide and seek played in the basements, attics and barns, thus creating, in the paraphrase of Freud, an imaginary world which is taken seriously. Immanent to the modular "painting" of Petković is the unencumbered interference of colour, shape and space. With Stefanov, the play with the material represents mental release from the tension, while for Manev the play means achieving unity with the spontaneity of the creative gesture. Finally, the common denominator will suffice for this human play-authenticity (only my play is authentic) to vindicate its relevance for these six authors.

- Accepting the creation as a love game (something akin to *arte mia* or *amore mio*), raises the question of the intensity and energetic concentration as the essence of the work of art, of its replenishment with life giving substance. These artists are sharing a creative and existential attitude of VITALISM - (as formulated by Moore). The intensive visual experiencing of the reality is finding its counterpart in the fine artistic transposition, that is to say, it transcends within a dense inner dynamics of the work.

- This impression is being further supported by the renewed interest among the exhibiting artists for the problems of THE matter. The artists' concern is not only about its primordial factuality, but also about the layered exploration of the mysterious inner structure of nature and of life (unlike the technical-technological principles of analysing the matter which is particular to the Structuralists, i. e., to the Enformelists). From the attachment to the nature, the soil, the vital and the organic, throughout to the ageless existence, emanates an alternative, intellectualised interpretation of the matter. Stefanov uses straw, hay, string, wood ..., Svetieva clay, Petković cardboard and synthetic enamel, Šemov dried plants, Nikoloski tree shoots (mainly unorthodox fine artistic means of expression), navigating the bloodstreams of the matter in quest for answers to the eternal questions about the secrets of existence. The concern about

the pulse, the vibrations, the temperature ... of the real substance, belongs to the context of the mutual thesis on bringing to life the human spiritual spaces through concrete, tactile, true things, which are communicated with evident emotional tension. It seems to me that the works of these Macedonian artists, which have been recently displayed at the Gallery of Contemporary Art in Zagreb (27.11-15.12.1985), using certain "adapted" and specifically reduced handwriting, do encircle the mental aspect of the New Artistic Practice of the Seventies and its disposition for rehabilitating the purely pictorial expressiveness.

- The totality of the existence, which is in the focus of the artists' interest, reflects itself in the desire for attaining an integral fine artistic vision. The inclination to ambiental setting of the works aims towards a conclusive presentation of the individual, the existential and the pictorial researches and dilemmas. This determination strives to achieve the status of an "OPEN WORK OF ART", bearing implicated and yet, not always elaborated questions and enigmas, of a work of art which will host meditative and contemplative activities with all those souls inclined towards the free dialogue with the authors. This accessibility does not aspire to provide ready made recipes - on the contrary, it devises deep questions (about the space, the universe, and the nature), it initiates reflections on certain aesthetical, ethical, sociological, semantic perplexities which are relevant to the fine arts. Active viewing is required, participation and fellowship with the viewer.

The steering in the direction of global vision, of general and social aspects of the problems, calms down the animosity of the figurative-nonfigurative binoms on one hand, and of the rationality-emotional ones, on the other. Those antagonisms in the act of joining are losing their tension and factuality. All the exhibiting authors, recognising the "marital bondage" between intuitive creation and mental operations, abolish the attendant traditional animosity as it was addressed earlier. Equating the personal act of demolishing the conventions and their projection of a new space, these artists, all but in Machiavellian way, are striving to attain, as an absolute objective, an individual language of their own. Petković unites the free gesture and the reduced form, Šemov couples the candor of the game and the geometric design, Svetieva unites the psychological diving and the cutting of the figures, Nikoloski associates the construction of the space and the intimate interventions, Stefanov the softness of the objects and reduced shape: everything is subordinated to the quest for an autochthonous fine art. The irrelevancy of the dualism between the presented and represented is based on identical motives and reasons. If

Petkovic chooses the intrigue of the painted fragments, the space, the autonomy of gesture or the colour as a primary interest in his creative exploration, than the question of whether his visions are involving associative, figurative or abstract connotations becomes misdated

- By contrast, the really relevant is the relationship with the TRADITION. There, "grosso modo", may be defined three ways of its "usage":

a) Starting from one's own national ethno-geographic and cultural-artistic domain and, explicitly or implicitly, transmitting it in fine art terms.

b) The tradition as integral inheritance - "art which is born from the art". Subliminal or conscious elaboration of memories are accepted in their extended dimension: as an apprehension of one's inability to remain immune to the influences of the cultural history, as well as the knowledge that these influences may be legally exploited in creative purposes. If we now approach the "New Image", than we should stress that the participants at this very exhibition do not embrace altogether this movement's thesis, yet they rest upon the Post-modern segment which clears the field vis-Á-vis the borrowings. In this context, Stefanov freely adopts certain forms from Frank Stella, Petković quotes the handwriting (from the beginning of the Forties) of Pollock, or in certain way, he quotes Matis from "La Danse", while Svetieva states the frightened gaze and the smirk from the archaic kouros of Chrete, Nikoloski performs a retro-vision over the "Palace at four o'clock in the morning" from Giacometti. However, this debit regarding someone's other "images" , is not of particular bearing for the artists.

c) Uniting the closer and the broader meaning of the tradition. The manifested pictorial discourse which emanates from the essence of one's own tradition, and which is being developed in the direction of universal spheres of expression, is most convincingly declared in this layer. Such reworking of the tradition clears the way for an authentic creative commitment of these artists, yet at the same time pointing at some intertwining, resemblances or coincidences with certain auctorial investigations typical for the present artistic ebulliences, both home and abroad (Edita Šubert, Tugo Šušnik, Michel Butt, Robert Kachner, Frank Stella, Rosemary Castoro, Nancy Graves, Yahata Harumi, Suzuki Fussako, Takahata Akira etc.).

- Yet, Šemov, Manev, Svetieva, Petković, Stefanov, Nikoloski are thinking and acting quite independently. Greater part of them receives the information about the artistic movements at home and abroad only by mediation. Remaining concentrated on the creative energy to be released from themselves, these artists do believe that "when the man really confirms its identity, ever so convulsive, its medium acquires a character of

style" (Robert Motherwell). The variety of artistic wordings which they offer, comes as a consequence of the faith in the AUTHOR'S APPROACH, in the PERSONAL DICTION, in the SELF-DISCOVERING. They are, thus, conceiving the space with distinct respect for the fine artistic entity (as a substitute for the protesting and antagonistic attitudes towards the institutions and the way of life in general, which is, in its own right, particular to the "locution in first person" of the Seventies).

Distant, as we stated previously, from collective, mass-oriented trends, they create with emphasised will, love and faith for the art, re-evaluating it as ritual of life and creation, as a heightened tension of artistic exaltation, which enables a total accomplishment of the creative identity of the human and the authenticity of the artist.